



**MODERN HUMANISTS  
RECONSIDERED**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A SHORT HISTORY OF FREETHOUGHT, ANCIENT AND  
MODERN. (Third ed.; 2 vols.)

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# MODERN HUMANISTS RECONSIDERED

BY

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## P R E F A C E

THIRTY-SIX years ago the present writer delivered a series of lectures, under the title of "Modern Criticisms of Life,"<sup>1</sup> dealing with the six most distinguished "humanists" who had written in English during the previous fifty or sixty years. Since those estimates were penned, a whole generation, as in statistics and in literature we reckon generations, has passed—a lapse of time sufficient to change considerably the social environment. Of the six subjects, all save Ruskin and Spencer had died before the time of writing; but all were still to be recognized as highly influential teachers, each having, as the French say, "made a school." And now, more than twenty years after the deaths of the two longest surviving, it seems not ill worth while to ask how they look on retrospect, and how the world of to-day relates to them.

These short monographs inevitably fail, of course, to say all that is required to constitute an all-round estimate of the men considered. Thus, things are said in the older book entitled "Modern Humanists" which are still to be taken into account; while some judgments, it may be, are partly corrected, and others are reiterated. In the case of Spencer, again, a third estimate,<sup>2</sup> written at his death in

<sup>1</sup> Published under the title *Modern Humanists*, 1891.

<sup>2</sup> Reprinted in *Explorations*, 1923.

1904, sets forth in detail points of praise and blame not fully discussed in the earlier or the later study. But for most people, compact estimates are all that can be assimilated of the survey of the past ; and the present series of studies is planned as a general view of six of the outstanding figures of English culture history in the nineteenth century. To that end they are all really re-surveys, made perhaps with a better telescope, though with older eyes.

But inasmuch as these surveys obtrude the disquieting fact that in six eminent humanists of the last century there were chronically at work radical elements of self-contradiction, alike in thought and in action, it would be absurdly presumptuous to shun the inference that the twentieth-century critic in turn is likely to be at times in contradiction with himself. In fact, the persistence of self-contradiction in the human mind might be indicated as the outstanding problem in culture history, and as such worthy the scientific attention of the psycho-physiologist—as distinct from the so-called psycho-analyst.

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# CARLYLE

## I

It is a fine question whether the critic, of all men, can without serious self-impeachment avow a serious change of judgment. Hazlitt, who declared that he had always held the same opinions, has been duly reprovèd for boasting of a demerit—albeit the critic<sup>1</sup> took the oblique course of putting as a test the case of the opinions of a boy of fourteen and a man of fifty, and treating the claim of constancy as an avowal of having learned nothing. But it is nonetheless a serious matter for the critic, as such, to have to avow that he has given a false judgment; for it means that, however honest in intention, he had used false tests. When Arnold passed from a weighed disparagement of Byron as “empty of matter” to a placing of him with Wordsworth at the head of English poetry for his century, he gave a new and startling justification for the common disregard of criticism, by his countrymen, as something transitory and negligible.

And yet it is of the essence of the critic's function to reconsider his own verdicts. If he has realized (and if he has not he is unscientific) the fact that all æsthetic and moral judgments are complexes of relations between the object and the varying scrutineer, he must in honesty be prepared to make confession of change of position when he finds that it has taken place. And if it should chance that the change is such as to discredit his claim to authority, the more honest he is in his function the better will his service be (if he can render any) in respect of giving his reasons. It is the penalty of literary criticism that, seeking to be in itself, in some degree, literature, yet also science in respect of being demonstrable truth, it

<sup>1</sup> Leslie Stephen, *Hours in a Library*, ed. 1892, ii, 84.

normally tends to be as subjective as the writings it judges ; whereas its true function is the rendering of reasons. Failing in that, it is justifiably dismissible as falling short of the nature of science—as being, in fact, only egotistic didactic literature, possibly attractive as such, but as judgment negligible.

Since, then, all useful concrete criticism is bound to take note of conflicting judgments and make reasoned choices, else it is a mere adding to the cairn of personal impressions, it is meet that we should revise our judgments of important people for our own sakes, seeking to be clear as to why we judge of them as we did or do. If we find we were wrong, let us give the how and why ; if we substantially hold to the same views, we shall be at least surer of our ground. The criticisms here following are delivered from the desk at which were delivered estimates of the same six men a generation ago. They should be at least a little more mature.

Concerning most of the six, above all concerning Carlyle, there has been much biographical and critical writing since 1891. So far as books about them, and the publication of their letters, can more fully reveal them to us than they themselves did by their books, we may be said to know them better than did most of their contemporaries. And that alone is a reason for asking ourselves whether in the past we appraised them rightly—a reason, that is, if the business of criticism be admitted to possess perpetual importance. I can quite well understand that that should be denied. And though it might be sufficient to reply that criticism, like golf and theatre-going and politics, goes on perpetually because men are irresistibly moved to occupy themselves in those ways, it is more straightforward to ask ourselves why, when all is said, we do estimate and re-estimate, judge and re-judge, alike our teachers and our artists, generation after generation. It is, I think, that we seek to focus and map our inner world as we do the outer, to connect our view of the humanist with our view of the life upon which he expatiates, to realize him in terms of our total philosophy of life, or of that generalized view of life which does duty with us for a philosophy. In a

word, we seek an order in our outlook on the current criticisms of life as in our outlook on life itself, and in our concepts of the countries and peoples of our planet. Seeing in human character a main feature of our problem, we contemplate the would-be teacher as in himself an aspect of the whole.

Criticism, so to speak, is the means to the geography of our world of ideas. And as the early maps were but rude approximations to the actual shape and relative positions of the lands they delineated, till they were reduced to precision by patient use of exact instruments, so do our estimates of the historical past in general, and of the men who figure in it, come under revision, to the end of a truer notion of what was done, how they did it, and what they finally mean for us. And to that process there is no end. For as we change, as one generation melts into another, the retrospect alters in its relations as does the landscape through which we pass in travelling. And if our estimates are to have any enduring value we must make right allowance for that change in the perspective, judging men in the light of their own day and not of ours, save inasmuch as we actually have a fuller knowledge of them than we had while we were their contemporaries. The primary requisite is that we should still be agreed in thinking all of those men to be worth re-considering.

Carlyle's case, perhaps, has been the most constantly under revision, insofar as the bulk of the reading world is concerned about the matter at all. This is due to the zeal of his surviving devotees, who, however, really have Froude to thank for supplying them with a good live grievance by his handling of the domestic aspects of Carlyle's life. When, stung by the attacks upon himself for what he felt to be a moderate statement of his notions about Carlyle as a husband, Froude proceeded to put one which was neither moderate nor true, he reached his own nadir of authority, and the rehabilitation of the subject seemed to the defenders relatively complete. But the question of Carlyle's domestic imperfections, which were quite real but really not deadly, was never the main issue for serious criticism. There is an



analogous issue about Mill and his sisters, for anybody who cares to labour over it.<sup>1</sup>

In Carlyle's case the defenders seem largely agreed in carrying the attack to the other side of the hearth and impugning the personality of poor Jane.<sup>2</sup> It is rather a mean revenge at best, in view of the fact that Jane, however she may have repented and repined over her marriage, and even invented injuries for herself, did for many years slave very hard for Thomas, who freely admitted that he never did half as much for her. But when the partisans of Thomas join in impeaching poor Jane on the score that she lacked a sustaining and comforting religious belief,<sup>3</sup> such as, by implication, was possessed by her spouse, we are conscious of one of the very worst kinds of influence that Carlyle ever set up. Those who can assert that *he* attained serenity in respect of a religious or any other kind of belief are capable of asserting anything. Hypnotized by the prophet, they assert or imply what we know to be false; even as they shut their eyes to the fact that he doled out to his wife insufficiencies of what was really her inherited income and not his. What their attitude reveals is the persistence in Carlyle's disciples of his own temperamental mode, the impulse to browbeat opinion, in defect of the power to reason and convince.

But it is time that the Carlyle problem should be reduced to scale and the domestic issue marked down to its proper

<sup>1</sup> See the preface of Miss Mary Taylor to the *Letters of Mill*, edited by Mr. Hugh Elliot, 2 vols., 1910. It is pretty evident that Mill believed his sisters to have spoken unpleasantly concerning Mrs. Taylor—as sisters naturally might. That he should have permanently resented this seemed to them strange and unnatural. But their attitude of injured innocence does not prove that they had never given just offence. What seems to have been lacking in Mill at this point was the touch of humour which in a lucid moment he saw to be requisite for the right conduct of life.

<sup>2</sup> Compare Sir J. Crichton Browne and A. Carlyle, *The Nemesis of Froude*, 1903, pp. 29–31, 54–5 (contrasting p. 43); R. S. Craig, *The Making of Carlyle*, 1908, pp. 373, 375–6. Mr. D. A. Wilson (*Mr. Froude and Carlyle*, 1898) holds the balance more fairly, but leans to Carlyle's side; see ch. xxxv.

<sup>3</sup> This view of the case perhaps derives, at the outset, from a letter of Irving's given in Mrs. Oliphant's *Life of Irving* (5th ed., p. 265). After a sentence mentioning the Carlyles there is marked an omission; whereupon follows Irving's apostrophe to Mrs. Irving: "My dearest wife, what I owe you of love and gratitude!"

proportion. He was not the ideal husband for Jane, but who would have been? Criticism is concerned first and last with Carlyle the writer, the teacher, the historian, the prophet—or, as some of the devotees unwarily put it, the thinker. The revulsion against his prestige that was set up by Froude's *Life* was fortuitous in so far as it turned on the private matter rather than on the public. The question of the merit or demerit of the art of Dickens is not to be tried, even by the women, on the point of *his* marital merits. A man's personality indeed enters into his work, and criticism will never ignore it, will even find it illuminative; but there remain two distinct problems, of which the first belongs to philosophical criticism, and the second is too apt to descend to what has been termed gossiposophy.

Curiously enough, the revulsion set up by Froude—who, when all is said, was himself a Carlyle worshipper—did not all go one way. While there was the usual perturbation over the discovery (as old as the date of Boswell's Johnson) that the man whom reverent readers had placed on a pedestal was in biography quite a human being after all, some who had only partly known him found him made newly attractive. Fitzgerald, who after repugning at Carlyle's oracular airs of style had come partly under his didactic influence, and then grew humorously indifferent, found in the *Life* the revelation of a man whose goodness of heart he had not previously felt, and had not seen at all revealed in the "Reminiscences," which had repelled him by their brutalities. To Fitzgerald in private Carlyle had shown himself a good deal of an egoist;<sup>1</sup> and for the Carlylean thunder and small beer the interpreter of Omar Khayyam had come to feel small reverence.<sup>2</sup> But he found in the *Life* a man who had done many an act of private kindness at much trouble to himself—a Carlyle who was new even to the man who had been his host. Let the discovery be clearly registered. Carlyle had both a bark and a bite; he was endlessly and often unscrupulous.

<sup>1</sup> Cp. A. C. Benson, *Fitzgerald* ("Men of Letters" series), pp. 75-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 74.

pulously censorious; he could be recklessly unjust;<sup>1</sup> but he had a scrupulous side to his heart also, and did many an anxious deed of kindness to fellow creatures who needed or seemed to need it. The evidence is abundant,<sup>2</sup> and should always be kept in view.

## II

The debit and credit sides of the critical account are harder to sum up and to balance. There is the usual difficulty about estimating how far Carlyle's status still holds; how many people now read "Sartor Resartus," or the "French Revolution," or the "Cromwell," or the critical essays; or in what sense he still ranks as a great name in the history of our literature. Inevitably he is much less read than he used to be; but that holds of many an enduring classic. Broadly speaking, all forms of fame are the expression of a certain power to magnetize, to hypnotize, to fascinate, whether by art or by action, by teaching or by thinking, by charm or vividness of speech or form or colour or sound, or by sagacity or impressiveness of manner or judgment. The great men of action have an enduring hold by their deeds: the world cannot forget Cæsar or Napoleon. And so with the great innovators in science: Copernicus, Newton, Darwin, are as marble pillars in our retrospect. But in the world of letters and the arts, especially as to letters, there are few permanent and many impermanent fames, because there the fascination turns on fashions of taste. These changing, the reputations fade.

Archbishop Whately, we are told, "was accustomed to speculate much upon that strange power of intellectual

<sup>1</sup> One of the most startling disclosures on this head is the revelation by Mr. Henry Graham (see the biog. pref. to his *Literary and Historical Essays*, 1908, p. xiii) that Carlyle's account of his namesake, mentioned in the *Reminiscences* (i, 313) as posing in the character of the greater Thomas, is utterly false. The attempt of the devotees to make light of the thing sets up an unpleasant impression.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Prof. Masson, *Memories of London in the Forties*, 1908, pp. 80-85; Espinasse, *Literary Recollections*, 1893, pp. 58, 243-4; Gavan Duffy, *Conversations with Carlyle*, 1892, pp. 187-8, 232; Moncure Conway, *Thomas Carlyle*, pp. 80, 126.

magnetism which enables some men to draw others to their views apart from any process of definite reasoning; and he acknowledged with truth that he was wholly destitute of it; that he had never produced any effect which could not be clearly accounted for, or altered any judgment except by distinct reason.<sup>1</sup> That Whately had Carlyle in view is to be inferred from the record by a friend that "he undervalued Carlyle and too hastily concluded that all his success was owing to the novelty and peculiarity of his style."<sup>2</sup> But Whately was not wholly astray. Perhaps, indeed, the good Archbishop underrated his own powers. Many people can be conquered by simple assertions not supported by argument or evidence; and he, with all his obvious concern for truth, occasionally dealt in these, carrying with him people who esteemed his judgment in general.

Such processes of influence are very various, and they often turn on æsthetic devices, good or bad, such as sibylline airs, dramatic fervours, wit, or turns of style. Mere confident asseveration, when the speaker has won an audience, decides the opinions of multitudes. Let a given book be pontifically declared, by some one with the pontifical gift, to be the greatest of its kind, and hundreds of people will proceed dutifully to say the same thing.

But there are many forms of hypnotism. Meretricious powers may for a while fascinate more than do even rare gifts; some men quite fail to fascinate their own generation, yet hypnotize the next; skilled handling of well-established conventions will spell success where new genius dies uncherished; but in the long run, we may say with some assurance, the verdicts are rectified. Certainly they are reconsidered, age by age. The conventions themselves wither, and the neglected genius is seen by fresh eyes to shine the more radiantly by comparison with the extinct modes. We then wonder at the blindness of our ancestors, not stopping to ask ourselves

<sup>1</sup> W. E. Lecky, *Historical and Political Essays*, 1908, p. 93. One wonders what Whately thought of the contemporary success of his own *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Bonaparte*. Of course he could have pleaded that it was merely a squib.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Whately*, 2nd ed., 1868, p. 469.

what readiness of welcome we ourselves have given to new genius or new truth in our own time until others had acclaimed it.

It is perhaps, however, the task of fairly "marking down" the exaggerated literary values of the past, as we learn to see them, that most severely tests criticism. A long prestige sets up a convention which to assail justly is no easy thing, since every really strong convention must mean a wide hold on appreciation; and if we are to discredit long-continued fame in general there is no foothold for durable appraisement at all. To call a book a classic is but to say that it has a continuing audience. When we seriously challenge a given reputation, we claim to do it by standards of appreciation which we believe to be enduring. Unless we reckon some qualities permanently precious, and can show that men have found them so, we have no persuasive critical standard properly so-called. Rational estimates are to be reached by noting how the appeal to acceptance was made, and what were the cultural conditions of the response. How arose, for instance, the vogue of the eighteenth-century poetry which we now tend to slight as pedestrian and charmless, but of which the tradition could sustain new practitioners until Shelley and Keats were dead in the odour of disapproval?

A certain imposing body of judgment had been built up through a hundred years of slow modification, in virtue of the adaptation of a mass of verse to a culture that ran rather to common-sense than to æsthesis, valuing commonplace as wisdom, and shunning alike profundity and passion, till all language was in a measure conventionalized, in congruity with the monotonous verse form. This movement was in itself the fruit of a reaction against the rhapsodical mode of literature and thought in the seventeenth century, when *afflatus* had come to be a mark of religious and political fanaticism. Distrust of that bred a distrust of "enthusiasm" (meaning the air of prophetic excitation as such) in style as in opinion. Once the charm of freer and more impassioned utterance was again slowly realized, after a period in which political convulsion had shaken the world in many ways, the

old verse convention gradually became as hard to vindicate as it had been to break down.

The fortunes of Carlyle's prose, up to the point of their decline, are in a manner analogous to those of Keats's poetry. When he had established his manner to his own mind, he found himself, as our slang has it, "up against" long-established standards of style and temper to which his manner was quite repugnant. Jeffrey, doing his best, for Mrs. Carlyle's sake, to get him a hearing in the "Edinburgh Review," liked his matter and manner as little as he liked those of Wordsworth in verse, and in effect told him that he "would never do." It was not that Jeffrey disliked all novelty of style: he delightedly welcomed as a new thing that of the young Macaulay—who, however, had a model for *his* style in Blair's "Rhetoric." The difference was that Macaulay's style and thought were alike easy of assimilation, whereas Carlyle's were not. As Coleridge claimed for Wordsworth, the really innovating writer has to create the taste by which he is to be appreciated. Carlyle, being at least as self-willed as anybody else, struggled on in his own way, with German translations and critical essays, of which the former could not "create a school,"<sup>1</sup> but the latter slowly did. Then came "Sartor Resartus" and the "French Revolution," the foundations of his future fame.

A biographical dictionary asserts that the latter book "established his reputation as a literary genius of the highest order"; but that is a telescoping of the process. The history had indeed an earlier measure of acceptance<sup>2</sup> than "Sartor,"

<sup>1</sup> One of Carlyle's most ambitious literary efforts was the exaltation of Goethe among English readers. There is little to show as result, though Goethe on his own merits found many English readers. Latterly Carlyle's confused and confusing panegyric has received contemptuous dismissal at the hands of his latest and most voluminous biographer (D. A. Wilson, vol. ii, pp. 165 sq.) in the matter of Carlyle's ecstatic trumpeting of the *Märchen*, of which Goethe himself hinted that it was a mystification, and which the latest German biographer declares to be one of Goethe's many failures to handle artistically the French Revolution. Carlyle's critical insight in the matter was nil.

<sup>2</sup> This, Mill privately claimed, was due to his prompt and laudatory review in the *London and Westminster*. See Caroline Fox's *Memories of Old Friends*, ed. 1883, pp. 116-17. The claim seems to be just; though Carlyle was latterly oblivious (see Bain's *J. S. Mill*, p. 50) of the service which he had once acknowledged (cp. D. A. Wilson, *Carlyle to the French Revolution*, 1924, p. 416). In his *Life of Sterling* he speaks of Sterling's review of the "French Revolution"

which by most of its few critics was at first scouted and flouted, Mrs. Carlyle being one of the very few to call it at once a work of genius. But she was a biased if a gifted judge; and Carlyle has told<sup>1</sup> how not a single one of the six copies of "Sartor" which he sent to *literati* in Edinburgh was even acknowledged—a detail which has been unjustifiably asserted to be quite in our normal Scotch way. The obvious fact is that the good gentlemen in question either knew not what to make of this new fashion of writing or were too polite to confess how much they disliked it. And there was no rapid general appreciation in England; though in the United States, where English novelties found freer way, it won admirers a good deal more readily than did the earlier publications of Emerson. Emerson's style, as it happened, was almost as restrained as Carlyle's was self-assertive; and in each case, and for the same reasons, the prophet only gradually found honour in his own country. If "Sartor" is on the whole Carlyle's most lastingly impressive book as sheer literature, it is nonetheless intelligible that, being very new-fashioned alike in style and in substance, and constituting a new order of what may be termed philosophical romance, it was slow to find an audience.

What Carlyle first earned was the literary appreciation given by young and unconventional readers to a mordant style, an aggressive personality, and a confidently ironical attitude towards all contemporary problems and most contemporary persons. Not that he had left untried other modes of accost. The essay on the "The Nibelungen Lied" (1831), for instance, is a very effusive attempt to attract interest by copious commonplace unction on a subject little known to the critic and less to the public. But that blandishment is laboriously amateurish; and the critic slowly found his account in the unemollient manner that was natural to him. The reviewer of the second edition of the "French Revolu-

as the first hearty appreciation he had received, entirely ignoring Mill's, which had been just as laudatory. But it is to be remembered that Southey also greatly admired the book, in defiance of Wordsworth's censure, and probably helped to make its vogue.

<sup>1</sup> *Reminiscences*, app. ii, 322.

tion" in the "Edinburgh"—Herman Merivale, a truer and more scrupulous historical thinker than Carlyle—observes, in 1840, that

Few writers of the present time have risen more rapidly into popularity than Mr. Carlyle, after labouring through so long a period of comparative neglect.<sup>1</sup> Whatever judgment critics may be pleased to pass upon him, it is certain that his works have of late attracted no common share of attention. His little school of sectaries<sup>2</sup> has expanded into a tolerably wide circle of admirers. His eccentricity of style has become the parent of still greater eccentricities in others, with less genius to recommend them; and his mannerism has already infected, to a certain extent, the fugitive literature of the day. Clever young writers delight in affecting his tone of quaint irony and indulgent superiority.

On this kind of basis, in the course of a generation, Carlyle's reputation was indeed strongly established; the "Heroes" and the "Cromwell," if not the "Chartism" and "Past and Present" and the "Pamphlets," having created a largely reverential reading public. In Edinburgh Carlyle's bust dominated the library of the good old Philosophical Institution, of which he was made honorary President, as another bust of him adorns the London Library, which he chiefly helped to found.<sup>3</sup> All young book-lovers in those days were sure to read "Sartor" and the "Revolution"; some of us read them thrice, revelling in their style and diction somewhat as we revelled in the poetry of Keats and Coleridge and Tennyson and the young Swinburne. We could repeat long passages of Carlyle's prose as we could recite whole poems of the others. The impression, the effect, was in both kinds æsthetic; and it will perhaps be the literary destiny of Carlyle to rank for posterity chiefly as a master of certain kinds of emotional effect, notably those of imaginative reverie, of which the last and best examples are to be found

<sup>1</sup> An opening sentence which by its defect of content hardly prepares us for the good criticism reached later.

<sup>2</sup> As to this, see Caroline Fox's *Memories*, as cited, p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> Thereby also hang tales. Carlyle is found complaining to Allingham in 1875 that "The London Library is choked with foolish books" (*Diary*, p. 236). It is also on record, however, that under the pressure of Carlyle the London Library acquired many volumes, German and other, which nobody else wanted and were not even used by Carlyle.



in the retrospective sections of "Past and Present." These stand at a higher level than the relatively immature "pictures" of the past which seek to make the "French Revolution" attractive to lovers of the historical-picturesque. To us of the mid-Victorian time they yielded a literary sensation which has not yet vanished. What passed away was the youthful acceptance of the general Carlylean outlook. How, then, came so many of us to lose (for I think we in time mostly lost) "that first fine careless rapture"?

### III

It came about, broadly speaking, as a result of a process of general critical appraisalment which developed with mental growth. Carlyle's style and substance were, then, well fitted to fascinate young reformers,<sup>1</sup> once the old conventional standards of style had been overborne by the large output of modern writing of all kinds. New vivacities of English style had been emerging from time to time for over half a century—Macpherson's "Ossian" in the seventeen-sixties and Blake's "Songs of Innocence" in 1789 (to say nothing of Burns) preluding in different ways for Coleridge and Wordsworth. A modern prose, equally touched with freedom of spirit, had later been created by Hazlitt and Lamb on the literary, by Burke on the polemic, and by Paine and Cobbett on the popular plane, before the young Macaulay had written his essay on Milton, or Carlyle any of his more ambitious critical essays. But there had been little innovation (apart from Burke) in the style of history or quasi-philosophic expatiation; and it was there that Carlyle first made his mark.

<sup>1</sup> As to the effect of the reading of the *French Revolution* on young bookmen see Kegan Paul's *Memories*, 1899, p. 169—describing a reading-aloud of the narrative of the Flight to Varennes. That narrative was later shown (by Oscar Browning, in *The Flight to Varennes*, 1892) to be entirely wrong in one main particular. Carlyle thought the distance was very short, and the journey therefore very slow. The facts were otherwise; and the total impression conveyed is accordingly delusive. But it was strong. And Caroline Fox tells (*Journals*, ed. 1883, p. 124) how John Mill's voice trembled with excitement as he read aloud Carlyle's apostrophe: "Stitch away, thou noble Fox." To-day nobody tries such effects, which were recommended to Carlyle by the example of Richter and other Germans.

With his habit of allusion to German and other mystical or otherwise abstruse writers, he did indeed set up an impression of deep speculative thinking among readers not given to or versed in such thinking. Of philosophic study he had really done very little,<sup>1</sup> despite appearances to the contrary. When in our 'teens we respectfully accepted Lewes's citation, as "profound," of Carlyle's saying that "Poetry is the attempt man makes to render his existence harmonious," we had, like Lewes, omitted to ask whether that definition would not equally hold of music, philosophy, religion, and gardening, and was thus neither a definition nor a description. Philosophic manner does not guarantee philosophic matter. Carlyle's impact was in the main made by the manner rather than the matter, the prophetic attitude and diction rather than the doctrine. For Carlyle at once differentiates from contemporaries such as Mill and Macaulay by the prophetic pose. Sara Coleridge put it: "His vocation is that of an *apostle*";<sup>2</sup> but that suggests a subsidiary rôle. Beside the style of most of his contemporaries, his was at once galvanic and volcanic, employing the manner of a revivalist preacher, scattering thee's and thou's, for the delivery of the amalgam of dramatic narrative, apostrophe, exhortation, and mysticism which constituted his "message" to two rapidly transforming generations. It was by carrying with him much of one whole generation of reverent young readers that he reached his maximum popularity. But it was chiefly those who had the fortune to preserve their mental juvenility out of due time that remained to constitute the dutiful chorus of praise. For Huxley in his 'teens, as for many another, "Sartor Resartus" was his "enchiridion";<sup>3</sup> but, like many less famous persons, he changed his course.

To such minds Carlyle figured as a modern Moses. Coming with guarded hints of religious change, wrapped in much

<sup>1</sup> "It is many years," he wrote in 1841, "since I ceased reading German or any other metaphysics, and gradually came to discern that I had happily got done with that matter altogether."—Letter in Espinasse's *Recollections*, p. 58. Compare the contemptuous reference to Kant in Carlyle's journal at the age of twenty-eight.—Froude, *First Forty Years*, i, 196.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoir and Letters*, ii, 195.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Huxley*, ed. 1903, i, 19.

vague but sonorous rhetoric, to an age which was beginning to lose its old creed yet clung to the forms and memories of faith, he became as it were a new theistic faith-founder; and those adherents who had been piously brought up talked in the pulpit manner about lips touched with coals from the altar. The atmosphere about him in his old age was largely one of hushed solemnity, as of medieval folk before the cell of a saint felt to be influential with the higher powers. One young worshipper found Carlyle's door thronged, in his old age, by the carriages of visitors;<sup>1</sup> and Froude and others record the constant stream of callers, often Americans, seeking counsel or comfort at the shrine. Not since Dr. Johnson ruled the literary field in his last years had any British writer earned such a prestige; and Carlyle was accorded a more serious reverence than had been paid to the lexicographer. And still the Carlyle "paper," outside, was steadily undergoing discount. Minto's quietly destructive estimate of his teaching had been current long before his death; and neither that nor Hamley's assault on his style had ever been rebutted.

There were two critical forces at work. Always there had been cool men who asked why what purported to be history should be written in a kind of prophetic frenzy, with sibylline contortions of manner, cryptic formulas, apostrophes to the reader, and an excitement of narrative always tending to flame into calculated rhapsody. To what end, they asked, were our nerves and sensibilities thus played upon? He himself, later, splenetically called his own lectures "a detestable mixture of prophecy and play-actorism";<sup>2</sup> other men thought similarly, if in milder terms, of his books before and after he lectured. Many were repelled, first or last, by his spasmodic flings at whatever happened to be going on. When he sardonically acclaimed the French Revolution of

<sup>1</sup> J. Beattie Crozier, *My Inner Life*, 1898, p. 383.

<sup>2</sup> Here, perhaps, the self-criticism came partly of a sense of the slightness of the basis, the study that had gone to the preparation of the lectures. But there was also a certain smarting under the consciousness (reminiscent of Irving) of having catered for popularity with fashionable people. The prophet must not, idealistically speaking, do such things.

1848,<sup>1</sup> John Austin wrote: "I cannot think with patience of any Englishman exulting in this awful ruin.....I don't wonder at any perverseness in so insane a coxcomb as Carlyle"; and the gifted Mrs. Austin, who in the previous decade had been warmly and helpfully friendly to Carlyle, entirely agreed with her husband.<sup>2</sup> In 1851, chiming with Whewell, she wrote of Carlyle as "one of the dissolvents of the age—as mischievous as his extravagances will let him be";<sup>3</sup> and in 1849 we find the once friendly Crabbe Robinson declaring that "Carlyle has been led by vanity to degrade himself more than any man of our age by the public defence of slavery as an institution."<sup>4</sup> In 1837 Robinson had been so repelled by Carlyle's language in defence of American slavery, as a case of "a natural and just aristocracy" over a lower race, that the good diarist writes: "He was personally civil to me, which I coldly noticed. I resolved to be no longer acquainted with him."<sup>5</sup>

In the last years of his life, these concrete issues had been largely forgotten; indeed, they had never been present to the minds of the majority, especially of his younger readers. The "Latter Day Pamphlets" had never been widely read;<sup>6</sup> the Revolution of 1848 was little remembered; new young readers went on conning "Sartor Resartus" and "Hero-Worship" and the "Cromwell" if not the "Frederick," appreciating also the "past" pictures in "Past and Present," if little edified by the others. What had begun to spread was a new criticism arising out of new problems, in particular those set up by the all-transforming doctrine of Evolution. When open-minded people, set newly thinking by that conception, realized that "the sage of Chelsea" had nothing

<sup>1</sup> "It is not a light joy,.....it is a stern, almost sacred joy, that the late news from Paris excite in serious men." Art. on Louis-Philippe, rep. in *Rescued Essays*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Three Generations of Englishwomen*, by Janet Ross, 1888, i, 216. If the Austins were aware that their friend John Mill approved of the Revolution of 1848, as he had of that of 1830, and was a vindicator of revolutions down to the end of 1851, they would presumably have set it down to Carlyle's account.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 272.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* p. 239.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Wilson's *Carlyle on Cromwell and Others*.

<sup>6</sup> Cp. Espinasse, p. 177 sq., and Larkin, p. 218. "They are now probably the least read of Carlyle's writings," remarks Espinasse.

for it but fierce derision, they began to wonder whether he was a sage after all.

Always angrily hostile to any kind of intellectual analysis of human problems, emptily vituperative of Bentham, Malthus, and the economists, he now declared himself even more furiously averse to Darwin and Spencer—to anything, in short, that involved scientific thinking. Only the intuitionists could any longer stand by him. The more philosophical theists, even, wondered at a theism so anthropomorphic as to be anchored to the conceptions of Genesis after rejecting the notion of revelation. And slowly, among even sympathetic readers, who found in Ruskin a prose that was quite as eloquent and "awakening" without being structurally convulsive, there began to gain ground a suspicion that the galvanic Carlylean style was not the consummate wonder that it had seemed to be, even in the "Revolution," to say nothing of the shouting and stamping of the "Pamphlets." He had hypnotized many by his personality. When the personality was found to be a fountain of furious folly, the whole came under new criticism.

Over the general literary method and the style there had always been protesters. "There is no repose, nor equable movement in it," wrote Fitzgerald in early days of the "French Revolution": "all cut up into short sentences, half-reflective, half-narrative: so that one labours through it as vessels do through what is called a Short Sea."<sup>1</sup> To such criticisms Carlyle's answer, we know, would have been in effect his answer to a counsel of calmness from Mill. "The common English mode of writing," he retorted, "has to do with what I call *hearsays* of things; and the great business for me, in which alone I feel any comfort, is recording the *presence*, bodily, concrete, coloured presence of things."<sup>2</sup> That was to say, the purpose of historiography, for Carlyle, was to excite his reader as with a vision of men and events, a perturbing contact with things past, as nearly as possible like what they might in his notion have had by living among

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Bernard Barton, cited in A. C. Benson's *Edward Fitzgerald*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Carlyle to Mill*, etc., 1923, p. 134.

them. Whether his notion was true was not a problem that greatly exercised him: the main thing was the effect. The readers who enjoyed being thus excited gave their spontaneous applause: the cool men went on to point out that it is possible to keep narrative vivid without making it quasi-theatrical, and to be impressive without a machinery of gesticulation and nicknames and shouting and face-play. Indeed, Macaulay's History had a wider public than was won by any of Carlyle's; and Carlyle always visibly resented the fact.

Save where a rival influence had won him in youth, as in the case of Goethe, or was in a reverent attitude to himself, as in the case of Ruskin, he is (like Macaulay) hardly ever found cordially appreciative of the gifts of contemporaries. Wordsworth, for instance, was something of a rival prophet, with his messages of "a wise passiveness" and a medicinal resort to Nature; and in Wordsworth, as we learn from the "Reminiscences," Carlyle could see little more than an excessive self-importance—not realizing from his own experience that that is a prophetic symptom. Perhaps, however, he had learned that Wordsworth spoke disrespectfully of *him*, as we know to have been the case,<sup>1</sup> though Carlyle "began it"; and it is not improbable that a similar reaction operated in his attitude to Macaulay, who is very likely to have animadverted in talk on the Carlylean style. But there was another influence at work.

Carlyle's jealous attitude towards Macaulay is revealed in nearly every reference made by him in conversation. When Allingham remarked that Macaulay had sought "to make an effect by style," Carlyle replied with a grin that "in that case we must say he had not succeeded."<sup>2</sup> But that was nonsense. By the tests of book-sales and acclamation, which were the tests in question, Macaulay had succeeded much better than Carlyle; and his success was for his public largely one of "style." His style is admired by many to this day.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the sonnet on Histories of the French Revolution (*Misc. Sonnets of 1842*, iv).

<sup>2</sup> Allingham's *Diary*, p. 241.

<sup>3</sup> For instance: Mr. W. S. Churchill, in his romance, *Savrola* (ch. iii), describes the closing sentence of the essay on Chatham as "that sublime passage whereby the genius of one man has immortalized the genius of

The annoying fact was that Macaulay had appealed to a much wider body of readers than Carlyle's, and Carlyle never forgave him for it. Yet Carlyle, as clearly as Macaulay, sought to attract by vivacity of manner; and had he found any such writing as Macaulay's in the books of the Cromwell period he would have welcomed it, as on his own principles he was bound to do. It was the reverse of "Dryasdust."

But Carlyle girded equally at Hallam for being Dryasdust, and at Macaulay for being readable. For all Hallam's sound and solid work he had nothing but jeering epithets; for Macaulay's third chapter he had not a word of praise. "Flow on, thou shining river!" was his usual comment on his rival. The due answer would have been: "Splash on, thou frothing cataract."

#### IV

And that was only half of the indictment. Carlyle is from almost the outset the professed custodian of a theistic philosophy of life; and by projecting it always in his own way, by interjection, by asseveration, by dramatic and ecstatic proclamations of conviction, he gave to many a new sense of sincerity of faith, a recovery, as it were, of the raptures of the Hebrew Prophets. Men who were but believers by traditional and inculcated emotion found in him what they vaguely regarded as deep thought, vision, a truly religious seizure of life. Yet even in the pre-London period the admiring Emerson, who on his first visit had sought him out of all men in the mother-country, wrote to Alexander Ireland concerning him: "My own feeling was that I had met with men of far less power who had yet greater insight into religious truth."<sup>1</sup> Emerson had his own intuitive faith, and Carlyle's did not square with it. Afterwards he put it

another." The old question of the relative literary stature of Macaulay and Carlyle, long ago summarily handled by Morley, is of course not to be determined by such judgments; but unfortunately it is not critically disposed of even by the highly expert pronouncement of Professor Elton.

<sup>1</sup> Cited in J. E. Cabot's *Memoir of R. W. Emerson*, 1887, i, 197; and in Moncure Conway's *Thomas Carlyle*, 1881, p. 221. It is edifying to note that the Catholic Patmore in turn finds Emerson "totally deficient in the religious sense" (*Principle in Art*, etc., ed. 1898, p. 120).

that "The greatest power of Carlyle, like that of Burke, seems to me to reside rather in the form. Neither of them is a poet born to announce the will of the God, but each has a splendid rhetoric to clothe the truth."<sup>1</sup>

"The truth": what, then, was that? Carlyle's truth was avowedly not the truth for Emerson, whose theism in those days approximated to a pantheism in which all aspects of the universe were at least theoretically expressions of divine purpose. Carlyle's emotional theism was by hereditary bias that of the Calvinism which he had ceased to hold theologically, the vision of an angry God fuming over the misdeeds of the men he had made and *ex hypothesi* governed. Men who substituted for Emerson's equally but much more tranquilly inconsistent pseudo-pantheism the sincerities of truth-seeking thought, bringing cosmic emotion to the measure of reason, saw that in Carlyle's theism the accounts were never balanced, either emotionally or intellectually. An astonishing thing about him is that, with all his alleged power of observation, it came to him as a surprise to discover, in his adult years, that Nature is "red in tooth and claw." The proceedings of a spider first interested and then infuriated him. Such was his relation to "God's world."<sup>2</sup> Here he compares notably with Ruskin. It was with Carlyle's theism as with that hypothetically put, later, by John Stuart Mill—the God is one who cannot get his own way. For logical minds this God was no saner a conception than that of the still current theology. Emotion for emotion, Emerson's was much the more comforting: he kept hold, as Arnold put it, "on happiness and hope." But as philosophies, as versions of the total truth of things, the two intuitions simply cancelled each other. As Emerson's biographer sums up:—<sup>3</sup>

Neither cared much for the other's ideas: to each, indeed, the leading idea of the other, the message he wished to bear to his

<sup>1</sup> Cabot, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> See D. A. Wilson's *Life*, ii, p. 374.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 196. Cp. H. Larkin, *Carlyle and the Open Secret of his Life*, 1886, p. 254: "Two more intrinsically incompatible ideals were never formulated than that of Emerson and that to which Carlyle now clung in the full maturity of his intellect....." See also Gavan Duffy, *Conversations with Carlyle*, 1892, p. 94.



generation, was a delusion. Had they been required respectively to define by a single trait the farthest reach of folly in a theory of conduct, Carlyle would have selected the notion [Emerson's notion, that is] that mankind need only to be set free and led to think and act for themselves, and Emerson the doctrine [Carlyle's doctrine] that they need only to be well governed.

For men who had begun to see life as an evolution, neither doctrine was anything more than a temperamental aspect, framed in terms of a fundamentally primitive theism that had undergone no adequate thought-process. Prophets, thinking men began to feel, were as such *not* thinkers; though a large public continued placidly to read both prophets without suspecting that they were at opposite poles in ideals.

Two other irreducible anomalies in the Carlylean gospel forced the criticism of the thoughtful. With all his hints at the untenableness of traditionary creeds, he took no open step towards their removal or reconstruction. The men of his day who sought sympathetically to adapt the traditional religion to modern intellectual needs received from him no countenance. Towards a liberal spirit like W. J. Fox he was as acrid as towards the "shovel-hats," describing him as a preacher who "patronized Peter and Paul as ignorant but well-intentioned persons, and delivered prayers which some one described as the most eloquent prayers that were ever addressed to a British audience."<sup>1</sup> "Carlyle never liked Unitarianism," writes Moncure Conway, "regarding it as a competitive variety of that Coleridgean 'moonshine' devised by and for those who had not the courage of their principles. 'If so far, why not farther?'"<sup>2</sup> That was exactly the question elicited by Carlyle's own procedure. What did he mean, and what did he want?

The clamorous insistence on absolute concern for sheer truth, stripped of all cant and formulas, was set forth by him in a style the most self-conscious, the most aggressively mannered, the most convulsively oratorical in contemporary literature; and yet the prophet of absolute veracity, pro-

<sup>1</sup> Gavan Duffy, *Conversations with Carlyle*, p. 167. The story is told in America of another preacher with an application to Boston.

<sup>2</sup> *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 123.

fessedly contemptuous of all who feared the telling of truth about anything, never openly said a clear, quietly serious word about the religious beliefs which he chronically hinted at as outworn. Nay, more; he denounced those who spoke out in obedience to his own gospel, and who had the intellectual courage which he lacked. The great work of Strauss he angrily aspersed, not as untrue, but as indiscreet—as “revolutionary and ill-advised.”<sup>1</sup> In his boyhood, he told Allingham,<sup>2</sup> he had horrified his mother by asking: “Did God Almighty come down and make wheelbarrows in a shop?” But while he said such things in private, he spoke no open word. The case is memorably summed up by the friendly Allingham, his frequent visitor:—

He was contemptuous of those who held to Christian dogmas; he was angry with those who gave them up; he was furious with those who attacked them. If equanimity be the mark of a philosopher, he was, of all great-minded men, the least of a philosopher.<sup>3</sup>

It was not only equanimity that was lacking: there lacked also fundamental coherence. To this day the range of his self-contradictions has been little noted, and some of them were not revealed in his lifetime. After the young Macaulay had effectively defended Cromwell, Carlyle was privately writing of that hero as flawed by dishonesty, “cunning and double,” “your true enthusiastic hypocrite, at once crackbrained and inspired; a knave and a demigod.”<sup>4</sup> A contemporary report of his course of lectures in 1839 represents him as crediting Cromwell with lying, but excusing the lying as compulsory in his circumstances. In his journal of that year he can say of Cromwell no more than this: “*Begin* to see him at times in some measure, *even* to like him and pity him.” Yet in the Lectures “On Heroes and Hero-Worship,” published in 1841, we find him alleging

<sup>1</sup> *William Allingham: A Diary*, 1907, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 253. That he talked thus at fifteen seems doubtful. But he used such phraseology in his old age. *Id.* p. 238.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 254.

<sup>4</sup> Refs. in the writer's *Spoken Essays*, 1925, p. 27 sq. These biographical facts are barely hinted at in Mr. D. A. Wilson's volume on *Carlyle on Cromwell and Others* (1925), where Carlyle is still acclaimed as the first to give a favourable view of Cromwell; and the flaws in his work are glossed over.

(whatever he may have actually said in the spoken lecture<sup>1</sup>): "*From of old*, I will confess, this theory of Cromwell's falsity has been incredible to me." It is painful to have to say that *this* must be pronounced a falsity, though it is conceivable that Carlyle really deceived himself, his vanity giving the lead. "*From of old*" could mean for him "ever since I had this certitude"; and he had the ear of a kind of follower who never dreamt of doubting the absolute veracity of the Master, or even of checking the assertion that Cromwell had found "no hearty apologist anywhere."

In his own day, too, it seems to have escaped notice that in his essay on Voltaire he speaks contemptuously of Frederick the Great,<sup>2</sup> who was to be his final Hero. William Archer has pointed out<sup>3</sup> how, in 1842, he could write to Burns's sister of the "noble life" of her "illustrious brother," yet could think of Heine only as "blackguard," and of Lamb only as a gin-drinker. Such judgments tell of a judge who could never be truly critical, since he could never so realize his contrarieties of impulse and prejudice as to work through them to a rational test.

This is clear within the limits of the single essay on Burns, as well as on the collation of that with the account of Burns in the lecture on "The Hero as Man of Letters"—an absurdity of classification forced on the lecturer by the recollection that, on his own former verdict, Burns as a Poet did not count. For that judgment is in effect put several times in the essay, alternating with declarations that Burns is a true poet, the greatest of British song-writers, than whom, "strictly speaking, perhaps no British man has so deeply affected the thoughts and feelings of so many men." At the same time, "far more interesting than any of his written works.....are his acted ones.....These poems are but like little rhymed fragments scattered here and there in the grand

<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to know whether or not the text stands for the spoken word. See Wylie's *Thomas Carlyle*, ed. 1909, p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> "This was not the age of deep thoughts; no Duc de Richelieu, no Prince Conti, no Frederick the Great, would have listened to such" (*Miscellanies*, vol. ii, ed. 1872, p. 143).

<sup>3</sup> *Study and Stage*, 1899, p. 24.

unrhymed Romance of his earthly existence.....And *this too*, alas, was but a fragment"—nay, a tragical failure, calling "much more" for "charitable judgment" than the Poems, as to which "the aim and the manifest power to fulfil it must often be accepted for the fulfilment."

There can hardly be found in "standard" literature a critical document so incoherent, so internecine in its theses, as Carlyle's essay on Burns, which is still the theme of Carlyleans' praise. Losing the critical minds, the prophet retained the allegiance of those of his own cast who admire without examination, their emotional state excluding realization of detail. In the Burns essay almost every concrete judgment lapses into self-contradiction. It is so with the paragraph on "Tam O' Shanter," with that on "The Jolly Beggars," with the general judgments on the songs, the poems, and the prose of the Letters. To say nothing of the solemn fatuity of the finding that Burns ought to have lived a life of sober toil, diversified with pure and unalloyed poetry—a pronouncement which "strieth a man more dead than a large reckoning in a little room"—the total or ultimate purport of the essay is (*a*) that it is a pity Burns had not a university education; (*b*) that that is a foolish idea, because poetry lies in the heart and not in the tongue; and (*c*) that it is also a pity that Burns could not have been set by his patrons or by his country to do something more important than gauging beer-barrels; but (*d*) that that also is a foolish idea, because only self-help counts, and Burns was ruined by bankruptcy of the soul!

The essay may serve as an unintended justification of its author's frequent praise of silence, inasmuch as its twenty-four thousand words yield us but a tissue of earnest self-confutation. No writer ranking as great, perhaps, is in criticism so earnestly verbose, so planlessly voluble, so profuse of booming commonplaces and soulful passages that lead to nothing. But the Burns essay has an exemplary value as illustrating at large, in a free field, under no constraints from convention, the congenital anarchy of his intellectual processes. That he is a combination of incompatible

tendencies is the verdict we shall be forced to come to when we have studied him all round; and, leaving it to the physiologists to find the solution which we shall certainly not get from the psycho-analysts, we may content ourselves with noting that in this "war within," and in the incapacity of the reflective faculty to perceive and resolve it, lies at least the proximate explanation of his final inutility as a thinker.

Again and again, in his talk in old age, he avows that the one essential basis of his belief in a deity is the inference from the "ineradicable love of justice and truth" in the human soul<sup>1</sup>—"the feeling I have deep down in the very bottom of my heart, of right and truth and justice."<sup>2</sup> "I know nothing whatever of God except what I find within myself, a feeling of the eternal difference between right and wrong."<sup>3</sup> And all the time, through all his books, he has been bewailing the *lack* of that sense of justice and truth, of right and wrong, in most or many human beings. And his own sense of right and wrong was again and again in vital conflict with that of multitudes as much in earnest and as theistic as he—for instance, on slavery and the humane treatment of criminals. His ethic was a standing contradiction. Right, he said, gives Might; which is the vindication of every tyrant. It is significant of the small play of thinking power in Carlyle and his school that he and they have always declared the formula "Right is Might" to be the *contrary* of "Might is Right." So fallacious a proposition<sup>4</sup> may serve to reveal to any one alive to its nature the fatality of all Carlyle's declamation on the *philosophy* of ethics. The man who could thus trip over his own skirts was ill fitted to handle such a problem as utilitarianism at all. And on concrete issues the moral fervour which was the main source of his influence, as apart from his power of expression, was so uncontrolled by any sense of consistency, so primed by prejudices and aversions, that he staggered his own devotees.

<sup>1</sup> Allingham, p. 264.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 268.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 256.

<sup>4</sup> It is astonishing to find it passed without challenge by Sir Leslie Stephen, *Hours in a Library*, ed. 1892, ii, 289. The essay in question, however, may be regarded as an immature production.

When even his own moral sense, which had glozed for him the character of Frederick, recoiled from that of Napoleon, he lapsed to the puerility of denying that Napoleon was a great general.<sup>1</sup> The whole aspect of his ethic thus becomes that of a kaleidoscope in the hands of a passionate sentimentalist.

And while the general Carlylean view of things thus came to figure for the critical minds as one of the hundred-and-one insolvent philosophies of life, it failed no less to win any more than a success of esteem on the practical side of things, upon which Carlyle had so earnestly striven to concentrate himself. One of the best of the types influenced in youth by him as a teacher on life and duty was Arthur Hugh Clough, concerning whom his friend Hutton has written that "it was Carlyle's injunction to men to clear their lives of misleading pretensions that led Clough to leave Oxford"; and he quotes Clough as saying later: "Carlyle led us out into the wilderness and left us there." This, says Clough's latest biographer, Mr. J. I. Osborne,<sup>2</sup> "appears to have been a favourite remark with Clough: he made it also to Emerson, when he was seeing him off for America at the Liverpool docks in 1848. And Emerson told Edward Everett Hale that many other young Englishmen had said the same thing to him."

On this issue, so far forth, there can hardly be much dispute. We have Carlyle's own declaration, recorded for us by Mr. Henry James, senior, who has left perhaps the most vivid and convincing of all the records of Carlyle's talk,<sup>3</sup> that when the poor rich young men of the Young England school, led and represented by Lord John Manners, called upon Carlyle to ask for guidance, he sardonically told them that he had no idea of what they were after, and had no guidance to give. But this, it may be urged, was the attitude of his disillusioned and apathetic latter years, cynically projected back into that past in which he had really been much concerned to guide men on the "Condition of England Question."

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* pp. 227-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Arthur Hugh Clough*, 1920, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Though those of Allingham, Espinasse, Duffy, and Conway cover more ground and are more varied.

The "Chartism," the "Past and Present," and the "Latter Day Pamphlets" are there to show how he had felt and striven. And this brings up a very interesting aspect of Carlyle's life and ideals in his middle period.

## V

After Carlyle's death, Mr. Henry Larkin, who had rendered him secretarial service, set forth in his book on "Carlyle and the Open Secret of His Life" the view that the sage's central ambition, at the time of his highest energy, had been to become in some way a working politician, an official administrator, a "captain of men," who should bring some measure of order out of the disturbing chaos of English industrial distress. This is not unlikely *a priori*, and there is evidence enough for it in detail. As Mr. Larkin notes, Carlyle believed intuitively in the allotropic quality of intellectual power, the potentiality of a good mind to achieve indifferently any order of intellectual distinction. In his most dogmatic fashion he had declared that Shakespeare could have done Bacon's work as well as his own; and in the "Lectures on Heroes" he says in so many words:—

I confess I have no notion of a truly great man that could not be *all* sorts of men. The Poet who could merely sit in a chair, and compose stanzas, would never make a stanza worth much. He could not sing the Heroic warrior unless he himself were at least a Heroic warrior too. I fancy there is in him the Politician, the Thinker, Legislator, Philosopher;—in one or the other degree he could have been, he is, all these.

The theorem<sup>1</sup> is so wildly wrong as a generalization—save on a definition of "the Poet" which will exclude most of the poets in history, from Virgil and Catullus to Victor Hugo and Browning—that we need to remember the lead Carlyle

<sup>1</sup> This, as it happens, Carlyle got from Dr. Johnson, who argued that "People are not born with a particular genius for particular studies or employments, for [that] would be like saying that a man could see a great way east, but not west" (Miss Reynolds's *Recollections*, app. v in Croker's Boswell, ed. 1847). Johnson's notion was that genius is just "good sense applied with intelligence," and in particular cases with "great application." When we try to imagine Dr. Johnson giving great application to the task of writing *Tom Jones* we may partly realize the scope of his error.

had had to it from the case of Goethe, who had actually done useful administrative work in the little Duchy of Weimar, besides handling some concrete studies little affected by poets in general. Whether Carlyle ever seriously supposed that Virgil could have played Cæsar, or, conversely, that Cromwell might have penned "Lycidas," or that John Knox could have written "Utopia," or Napoleon "The French Revolution," or Newton "Robinson Crusoe," we need not inquire; what is apparently true is that he thought he himself could have achieved something in public life had he been put in some post of power. The impulse, Mr. Larkin thinks, underlay the writing of "The French Revolution," and grew stronger through the next ten years, up to the death of Peel, to whom Carlyle had secretly and silently looked with some hope of being appointed by him to some administrative post.<sup>1</sup>

When we remember that Peel, whom Carlyle had publicly acclaimed for abolishing the Corn Laws—the sole recognition on his part of the importance of economic science to an industrial nation, and a recognition cancelled by him in later life<sup>2</sup>—was the same statesman at whom he had previously jeered as Sir Jabesh Windbag in "Past and Present,"<sup>3</sup> we can partly realize the consummate futility of the aspiration. In no place to which Peel might have appointed him could Carlyle have served with the slightest success. As a parliamentarian he is simply inconceivable. Of the cool patience which deals with and either conciliates or overcomes oppo-

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Larkin is here fully corroborated by Mr. Espinasse, p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> "Their [Cobden and Bright's] free trade was the most intense nonsense that ever provoked human patience" (Gavan Duffy, *Conversations*, p. 218).

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Larkin (p. 234) gives us the measure of his critical rectitude when he says that Carlyle's later recognition of Peel's worth "speaks well for the *magnanimity of them both*." Not one word of shame for the blatant insult, on either Carlyle's part or his champion's; no confession of the folly which a few years before saw nothing but food for fierce derision in the personality to be later acclaimed by the same voluble mouth. Those who put it that Carlyle "retracted" his insult seem to have no suspicion that a prophet should ever be ashamed of having played false. For Mr. Larkin's view that Carlyle had much to do with converting Peel to Corn Law Repeal there is not a particle of evidence. It is improbable that Peel could or would ever have found time even to read *Past and Present*. His literary taste would have revolted at its style no less than at its substance. Peel was converted by his economic insight, primed by the irresistible argumentation of Cobden, of whom Mr. Larkin says nothing.



sition he was wholly destitute.<sup>1</sup> Neither could he have served in any purely administrative office with a grain of satisfaction to himself or others. Constantly praising the virtue of obedience, he was incapable of obeying. The sum of his relations to the politics of his age is that he had swung between the opposite poles of revolutionary Radicalism and Cæsarism, hotly acclaiming in succession three French revolutions, while developing his faith in the Strong Man; then disgustedly repudiating his own prescription when he found it applied by Louis Napoleon. Of any fitness for the regimen of constitutional government he shows no sign at any stage.

He seems to have had a vision of himself as conducting on the one hand a system of State-enforced regimentation of labour, such as is schemed in the "Latter Day Pamphlets," and on the other a wholesale scheme of Emigration, by which superfluous British labour should be in perpetuity dumped on Crim Tartary or any other open territory on the face of the earth, there to sustain itself after being once settled.<sup>2</sup> To Malthus, or to the Neo-Malthusians who prescribed Birth Control, he had no more rational answer to give than have the obscurantists and the popular Socialists of our own day who dream that somehow human procreation can go on at blind will without harm, while, from the point of view of Socialist theory, every other form of human action must be "organized" if there is to be well-being.

Carlyle trying to play Cromwell in the modern world, with neither an army of zealots nor a public of believers to back him, is a phantasm of the Carlylean temperament over which we need not linger. His adoption of the old idea of Fletcher of Saltoun, the Jacobite of the reign of William and Mary, that idle labour should be reduced to serfage,<sup>3</sup> is the

<sup>1</sup> Froude has a story of his getting round an obstinate man on a jury on which he served. But that is a solitary instance.

<sup>2</sup> His latest biographer illustrates the moderate rate of intellectual progress by announcing that Carlyle "exploded" Malthus by the simple retort that the world was far from full of population. With equal wisdom, in the past, did worthy persons confute Copernicus by demonstrating that a full pot of water, left overnight, remained wholly unspilt in the morning.

<sup>3</sup> My friend Professor Kellner, of Vienna, whose *Englische Literatur im*

measure of his entire failure to realize the nature of the social process around him. As a plan for employing labour productively in competition with the underpaid labour of private industry it is on a level with that of an automatic instrument of perpetual motion. No more impossible scheme of State Socialism has ever been framed. Not in any vision of that order did he figure for most of the admirers who laurelled him on his eightieth birthday and the few who go on laurelling him still. At most we may believe that the convulsive desperation of the early appeals in his series of books on social questions generated in some wiser readers a rational concern over the problems in hand.

Even on that score his later champions have been unscrupulous in hailing him as the one man who spoke out. As a matter of fact, in politics as in religion he never gave to the world the ideas he ventilated in private. "It was part of his view," writes Moncure Conway, "that private proprietorship in land should be abolished"; but no such doctrine appears in his books. Other men were as concerned as he about the evils to be remedied, and more concerned to indicate feasible remedies. There was a whole library, in large part saner than his books, if duller, on the problems over which he fulminated; and *that* must partly be credited, for what it was worth, with the education of the public mind which followed. Mr. Lecky, who not unmagnanimously vindicated the memory of the prophet who had called him "a herbivorous—nay, a mere graminivorous creature," has actually credited the Master with first promulgating the ideal of national education.

"When Carlyle first wrote," says Lecky, "it was the received opinion that the education of the people was a matter in which the

*Zeitalter der Königin Viktoria* (1909) demonstrates his exceptional knowledge of modern English literature and life, sets forth a well-documented theory that Carlyle got both his "Right is Might" doctrine and his preference for slavery over anarchy from the Austrian Karl Ludwig von Haller, who elaborated such views in 1808 and 1816. The difficulty is to prove that Carlyle had read Haller. A similar hypothesis might be put as to his being influenced by Justus Möser (1720-94), who was prized by Goethe. But the proposed reinstitution of predial slavery was not only planned by Fletcher before either: it is posited as a treatment of vagrancy in More's *Utopia*.

Government should in no degree interfere.....In his work on Chartism, which was published as early as 1834, Carlyle argued that the 'universal education of the people' was an indispensable duty of the Government."<sup>1</sup>

This from a professed historian of English life, who really ought to have known better. To say nothing of Scotland, where parish schools had subsisted since the Reformation; to say nothing of Prussia, where compulsory school attendance had been enacted in 1717 and all schools and universities were nationalized in 1794; to say nothing of the example of Holland, which established a national system of education in 1814, there had been an energetic propaganda in England for such a system through the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Malthus had penned a strong protest on the subject in 1803; and in 1807 Whitbread had introduced a Parochial Schools Bill, which was passed by the Commons but thrown out by the Lords, though it pandered to the prejudices of Churchmen to the extent of enacting what Earl Stanhope denounced as the abominable principle that all public religious education was to be in the tenets of the Church of England.<sup>2</sup>

In 1816 the cause was taken up, on the inspiration of James Mill, by its great protagonist in that period, Brougham, who moved for and obtained a Select Committee of the Commons to inquire into the educational condition of the metropolis, Canning giving his support on the ground that the foundation of good morals is education. After further efforts a Bill for National Education was introduced by Brougham in 1820, unfortunately on the ecclesiastical lines of Whitbread's, and failed accordingly. But in 1833, when the matter was powerfully taken up by Roebuck,<sup>3</sup> the first vote of parliamentary money for purposes of education (£20,000) was actually passed in Supply; and in 1835 Brougham was able to say that the controversy which was so fierce in 1818 had passed away, the principle of national

<sup>1</sup> *Historical and Political Essays*, 1908, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> H. Holman, *English National Education*, 185

<sup>3</sup> See the *Letters of J. S. Mill*, 1910, i, 59.

education having been accepted.<sup>1</sup> The practice was indeed lamentably frustrated by the battle of the sects; but Carlyle wrought nothing whatever towards a solution of that; and to credit him with introducing the principle in the teeth of received opinion is to falsify history. He himself had not one good word for Brougham.

And this kind of pleading, even were it accurate in detail, cannot fitly come from those who set out to vindicate Carlyle's influence in general. To the utmost of his ability he discredited men who did help to bring about real reforms in social machinery. By the admission of many who have not been wholly enthusiastic about him, Jeremy Bentham wielded a cumulative influence in his day which wrought more than that of any contemporary not only to bring about important legal and other reforms but to prepare the next generation to think critically in other directions.<sup>2</sup> Yet for Bentham or his work there is not one word of intelligent recognition in the whole of Carlyle's writings. "Benthamism" is one of his stereotyped terms of contempt—an epithet standing for everything unspiritual and uninspiring. The inability of Carlyle and his devotees to see anything creative in the life-work of Bentham might be noted as one of the evidences of their shortcoming in the very faculty of imagination in which they suppose themselves strong.

The championing of Carlyle becomes a little pathetic when Mr. Lecky goes on to claim for him that "In his 'Past and Present,' which was published in 1843, he *threw out* another idea which has proved very prolific"—namely, the idea that "it may become both possible and needful for the master worker to grant his workers permanent interest in his enterprise and theirs." If the historian had turned to Mill's "Political Economy" he might there<sup>3</sup> have learned that a plan of profit-sharing had been set on foot by M. Leclair, a Paris tradesman, in the 'thirties, and had been

<sup>1</sup> Harriet Martineau's *History of the Peace*, ed. 1877, i, 121.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. C. M. Atkinson, *Jeremy Bentham*, 1905, pp. 236-7 and citations; Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, ed. 1905, i, 156; Leslie Stephen, *English Utilitarians*, ii, 42; Wallas, *Life of Francis Place*, ed. 1908, p. 65; Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> B. iv, ch. vii, § 5.

described by him in a pamphlet published in 1842, which was the probable source of Carlyle's inspiration.

In fine, Carlyle did not illuminate the path of social reform by new ideas; and it is quite doubtful how far his loud impeachment of his world in the 'forties had any effect in moving other people to improve it. One movement did seem to arise directly from his influence—a Society formed at Manchester about 1851, under the title of a Poor Law Association, aiming at the providing of employment for casual labour; but, though that was energetically pushed by Archibald Stark, the young journalist who started it, and Carlyle gave it support in the newspapers, it came to nothing, having no adequate organization. Carlyle, we are told, stood aside when it was proposed to form a London Committee<sup>1</sup>—and naturally so; for his ideal of "regimenting" the unemployed as State serfs would have found no backing; and the Committee could shape no machinery of a more practicable kind. As he did partly foresee, though he turned his back later on the light, the establishment of Free Trade began a new era of industrial prosperity, in which the call for State-aided emigration died down, emigration taking care of itself; while the social conditions slowly mended.

But there is no sign that Carlyle found any comfort in any material or other progress that took place; and after he had struggled through his "Frederick the Great" his work as a teacher and historian was, by his own reckoning, done. The listless pessimism of those last sombre years is a painful commentary on the entire Carlylean philosophy. He had repeatedly declared that in his youth the study of Goethe, with his gospel of work and serenity, had *literally* saved him from destruction, internal and external; but neither in the years of work nor in the years of rest is the serenity of Goethe ever seen to be attained by his pupil. Goethe was to the end serenely productive and cheerfully interested in the

<sup>1</sup> Espinasse, *Literary Recollections*, pp. 185-7. Espinasse remarks that Carlyle's long letter of encouragement was "never reprinted from the newspapers in which it appeared." Mr. D. A. Wilson's projected Life in five volumes may perhaps recover it.

movement of intellectual things. Carlyle, who in "Sartor Resartus" had proclaimed Goethe as a prophet to whom the Godlike had revealed itself (though the devout Mr. Larkin never agreed<sup>1</sup>), finally found neither in Goethe nor anywhere else balm for his soul.

## VI

Those final years of mournful idleness reveal a penalty of temperament. Through all his working years he conceives of his literary work as an attainment of nervous impression by every device that can communicate it, a perpetual propagation of excitement from himself to his readers. In a way, he compares with Dickens as a literary artist. He has a dominating sense of the concrete, the external; is punctilious about Cromwell's wart, Robespierre's complexion, Frederick's snuffy exterior. Here he is all for evidence. But to the demand for verification of judgments, the concern for *inner* reality, he is not merely unresponsive, he is actively hostile. Not by the rendering of reasons does he think to convey truth: truth *is* for him a nervous experience, a something literally felt, not ideated as a result of a reasoning process. He professed to reject Ruskin's gospel of art;<sup>2</sup> but his own entire activity, good or bad, is one of quasi-artistic endeavour, comparable to that of drama, rather than a seeking for truth

<sup>1</sup> Mill was equally dissentient as to Goethe. See his 1854 Diary in the *Letters*, ii, 368. Emerson, too, pronounced him an egoist, and denied him dramatic power and "the great felicities" of poetry. Index vol. of Routledge's ed. of Works, p. 193. But most striking of all is Carlyle's own final recantation as to *Faust*: "Na, I've not in later years set the same value on *Faust* as when I first read it. It's very far from bein' the best of Goethe's works; the philosophy of it is verra shallow and unsatisfying.....And as for the Second Part of it, I've never been able to find much interest in it; it's a confused jumble, the rakin's out of his mind." (*Norton's Letters*, i, 481-2.)

<sup>2</sup> "How can Ruskin (said Carlyle one day) justify his devotion to Art? Art does nothin' in these days, and is good for nothin'; and of all topics of human concern there's not one in which there's more hypocrisy and vain speakin'....." (*Letters of C. E. Norton*, 1913, i, 442-3. Cp. Allingham, *Diary*, p. 209.) We seem to be listening to the Puritan of the sixteenth or seventeenth century. But the Puritan never renounced the Art of Rhetoric, even in prayer; and Carlyle, without seeing its bearing on his censure of Ruskin, expressly avowed to Allingham (*Diary*, p. 209) that he had recognized writing to be an art. And in the Rectorial Address to the Edinburgh students he reverts to and proclaims the Goethean gospel—albeit with a doubtful sincerity.

and the demonstration of it by appeal to judgment. Only in such a task as his "Frederick," after he had given up his reformatory propaganda, could he find an occupation that would long carry him on; and the entire performance is a strenuous multiplication of all the literary effects left in his repertory—a convulsive dramatizing of every episode, an unending tissue of ejaculation, apostrophe, sarcasm, exordium, nicknaming, *bravura* portraiture, with a chronic parading of invented interlocutors in the manner begun in "Sartor," as if under a perpetual fear of losing hold of attention. As General Hamley pointed out, the result is often a mechanical resort to literary devices of the cheapest kind. Whatever he really thought of his public, no man ever strove more feverishly than he to titillate its nerves and win its notice. "You get an audience at last," he significantly observed to Mr. Espinasse<sup>1</sup> when the "Cromwell" had given him a really wide standing; and the "Frederick" was a strenuous effort to confirm it.

Of that work it may be said with confidence that had he found its literary methods employed by any contemporary writer he would have repugned and contemned them. His account of Zimmermann's Dialogues with Frederick the Great, which once "made immense noise in the world," recoils singularly upon his own History: "An unwise Book, abounding in exaggeration; *breaking out continually into extraneous sallies and extravagancies*—the source of which is too plainly an immense conceit of himself."<sup>2</sup> Substituting judicial for aspersive terms, let us say of each that the writer is first and last concerned with the imposition of his own personality on the subject while professing to proceed as a historian. In the matter of self-importance, no historian ever perceptibly outwent Carlyle. He, like Zimmermann, and with a greater gift, made due "noise in the world"; the fit history has still to come.

When the work was done he figured as an extinct volcano.

<sup>1</sup> *Literary Recollections*, p. 229. On his previous repinings see p. 228.

<sup>2</sup> *History of Frederick*, b. xxi, ch. ix, People's ed. x, 188.

The intellectual part of him no longer availed to yield him occupation. His friend Gavan Duffy asked him

whether he would follow "Frederick" by any other historical study. No, he said, he should probably write no more books; writing books was a task to which a man could not properly be encouraged in these times. Modern literature was all purposeless and distracted, and led he knew not where<sup>1</sup>—

ending with a fling at contemporary novels—"the 'Harry Lorrequers' and 'Oliver Twists.'" It was but saying that he himself was finally purposeless and distracted. All through his life he had spoken of the state of contemporary English literature in the same fashion: that could not then be the true explanation of his collapse. The saddest of his penalties was that he had never really enjoyed the experience of reaching truth by toil. Preaching, after Goethe, the blessedness of labour, he had rebelled over his own drudgery as no other man of letters ever did. The "Friedrich," he told Varnhagen von Ense, had brought him only weariness and vexation of spirit.<sup>2</sup> The "Cromwell" sets out with a dithyramb (very fine we thought it in our young days of docile discipleship) in execration of the mass of Dryasdust material that he had had to handle. Samuel Gardiner did far more Dryasdust digging than Carlyle ever attempted, and had to earn his living as a teacher while doing it, but *he* uttered no laments over his toil. And when all is said, the "Revolution" and the "Cromwell," whatever be their success as revivalist literature, are quite unsatisfying as histories, even as studies of character. He never got at the truth about Mirabeau; and the true portrait of Cromwell has yet to come. The devotees still speak of his labour over the introduction into the "Cromwell" of fresh material after the first edition; but no adequate labour was applied. Most of the fresh matter, as Mrs. Lomas has shown, was simply shovelled into Appendices; and the fiasco of the fraudulent Squire Papers, over which the intuitionist, with his faith in his nervous impression, had been

<sup>1</sup> *Conversations with Carlyle*, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> Conway, p. 106. According to Conway, he had lost taste for Frederick before the end. "What the devil had I to do with your Frederick any way?" he asked Varnhagen. But we get no such avowal in the book.



hopelessly deceived, remains the monumental testimony to the folly of such faith.<sup>1</sup>

His handling of the whole history is vitiated by the same vain faith in his intuitive judgment, which led him actually to tamper with his documents. Finding an alleged letter from Cromwell to Thurloe, now known to be an eighteenth-century forgery, he pronounces it "by internal evidence a genuine note"; but, seeing in spite of himself that there is something wrong about it, he deliberately garbles it, omitting some phrases and improving others; and all this without a word of avowal to his readers.<sup>2</sup> Even the real speeches of Cromwell are in wording constantly tampered with by him, to say nothing of the perpetual interrupting chorus of the adoring editor. The sum of the matter is that the expert student, appreciating the work as belonging "rather to the domain of literature than to the domain of history," finds that Carlyle's "account of the Protector's Government is in clearness and fullness much inferior to that contained in Godwin's history of the Commonwealth published nearly twenty years earlier."<sup>3</sup> He was at endless pains to fix the exact position of the wart on Cromwell's face, but could not take the trouble to trace aright his real share in momentous events. Faced by the phenomenon of Cromwell's early religious hysteria, upon which he might usefully have noted how any kind of culture environment may react on psychic commotion, he can but angrily and vituperatively declaim against all who over such a case are honestly unsympathetic. The spirit of the true historian is not in him. Above all, he never took the trouble to master aright either the previous history of England or that of the period immediately after Cromwell, so that he never sees even the Cromwellian period with a true historical comprehension.<sup>4</sup> The praise his book earned was largely

<sup>1</sup> "An impetuous truthfulness does shine thro' all his crazy vehemence" is his estimate of Squire at a late stage of the investigation. At the outset he had vouched for him as of "indubitable veracity." "The hater of shams had seen the impostor face to face and taken him for a true man." See Mrs. Lomas's edition, introd. by Prof. Firth, pp. xlii-xlv. Mr. D. A. Wilson's treatment of this question in the third volume of his *Life* is a critical scandal.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. xli.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. xxxvii.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* p. xlv.

that of literary men and amateurs and sectarians who lacked qualification to judge it; though qualified men at times treated the popular voice in the matter with deference.

It is really a relief to remember that in certain other matters the aged Carlyle underwent the experience of realizing that he had judged and taught wrongly. Setting out with his angry rejection of Negro Emancipation—a rejection primed at once by his fierce spontaneous sense of the need of men in the mass to be sternly ruled, and his anger at the facility with which people who would do nothing for white unemployment were moved by negro slavery—he could see nothing but food for derision in the long tremendous convulsion of the American Civil War. His squib entitled “Shooting Niagara, and After,” had aroused the contempt of sane men alike in America and in England. But, little as he was open to enlightenment through reason and argument, he was partly accessible to it on his better side, the side of his heart. An account of the gifted young men who had gone to the war from Harvard to die for the Union touched him to the point of an avowal that he might not have seen the matter aright; and he left to Harvard his collection of books on Frederick.<sup>1</sup>

But the personal vituperations which for him were critical judgments went on flying from him to the last.<sup>2</sup> Herbert Spencer was “an immeasurable ass”; Buckle “an inspired red herring”<sup>3</sup> and a “conceited blockhead”; Shelley had “not the least poetic faculty”; the Life of Keats was a “fricassee of dead dog”; “‘Paradise Lost’ is absurd”; Mill was “a thin, wire-drawn, sawdustish, logic-chopping kind of body”; Jane Austen’s novels were “dish-washings”;

<sup>1</sup> Froude, *London Life*, ii, 247, note; also note in the *Reminiscences*, ii, 35; Conway, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 106. It is interesting to gather from Allingham that on yet another point the prophet reached just views as against a conventionally false one. “Tom Paine has been entirely misrepresented. When I read the *Rights of Man* I found I agreed with him” (*Diary*, p. 227). Carlyle, it is to be remembered, began as a “Radical,” and was no admirer of Burke (Espinasse, p. 227; Wilson, *Life*, iii, 218–20). His later autocracy was a flying-off at a tangent.

<sup>2</sup> J. B. Crozier, *My Inner Life*, 1898, pp. 386–8; Espinasse, pp. 216, 228; Allingham, pp. 223, 242; Gavan Duffy, p. 218.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of C. E. Norton*, i, 487–8.

Lamb was but a gin-drinker, a "despicable abortion";<sup>1</sup> Darwinism was "a gospel of dirt";<sup>2</sup> Cobden's death was not worth lamenting; "Bright he considered one of the foolishlest creatures he had ever heard of"; even of Emerson, whom he professed to admire and love,<sup>3</sup> he observed to Gavan Duffy in talk that "he had a sharp perking little face, and he kept bobbing it up and down with 'Yissir, yissir' (*mimicking*) in answer to objections or expositions."<sup>4</sup> As the commination service goes on, we are almost moved to say: "As he judged, let him be judged. Such are the oracles of the prophet."

## VII

But flouts are not judgments worthy of the name; and they can help us no more than they did him. And in that "last phase," as reported by so many of his visitors, we seem to find the key alike to his performance and his personality. He was really, as one of his visitors sums up, and as his wife had done long before, a twofold personality—one is disposed to go further and say "threefold"—and we might revert to his own method so far as to say that one half or section of him was a "thrawn" Scottish Border Covenanter,<sup>5</sup> a heredi-

<sup>1</sup> It is easy to believe (see Mr. Lucas's *Life of Lamb*, 5th ed., ii, 789) that this is a revenge for a wound to self-esteem. That Lamb had behaved offensively seems to be well established. But that Carlyle in his anger should be unable to see in Lamb any genius is only one more proof of the infirmity of his literary and moral judgment.

<sup>2</sup> Compare Huxley's account of how Carlyle, infuriated by *Man's Place in Nature*, grossly rebuffed a street greeting from him (*Life of Huxley*, ed. 1903, i, 396). In the later seventies, three youths (two of them English) in Edinburgh, of whom the present writer was one, were foolhardy enough to send to Carlyle, as avowed admirers, a letter asking whether he had actually uttered the phrase above cited. Needless to say, they received no reply. The phrase was no random fling at Darwinism. Carlyle repeatedly expressed "the deep abhorrence of it that I have in my heart of hearts" (Allingham, p. 224).

<sup>3</sup> Though it is on record that, when Emerson mildly differed from him in a discussion on the character of Cromwell, he fiercely stood up with a gesture across the table and the declaration: "Then, Sir, there is a line of separation between you and me as wide as that, and as deep as the *pit*" (J. Searle, *Emerson: His Life and Writings*, London, 1855, p. 47. Cited by Shepherd, i, 20; cp. Cabot's *Memoir of Emerson*, ii, 133). This on a matter on which he had once been more adverse than Emerson.

<sup>4</sup> *Conversations*, pp. 94, 218. Emerson's London lectures were for Carlyle "moonshine."

<sup>5</sup> Conway (p. 130) remarks on "the spiritual pugnacity of the burgher in him.....He hated what he called *Schwärmerei*—the heaping of assent upon

tary oppugnancy which possessed and dominated him, setting him in angry and explosive opposition to everything which ran athwart his bias and his predilection, and was only to be laid or diverted by some impulse from the other part of him, the heart-part which supplied so many asides in qualification of the commination service,<sup>1</sup> never from a procedure of critical reason, calmly undertaken as a duty. There was in him an "Everlasting Nay" which he never solved in philosophy, though he balanced it at times with emotional upheavals. "He's as hard as granite and as soft as a rabbit" was his father's puzzled account of him as a child.<sup>2</sup> The child subsisted in the man. Sheer lack of determinant thinking power, as against feeling power, left even the element of good feeling in him finally inhibited by the element of bad feeling towards those whose thinking had outgone his.

In his books of declamation on the social problem we have the two spirits functioning alternately. A wild compassion for the unemployed inspires the work; but so does a wild anger at all who do not see as he does. What never comes is a reasoned *tertium quid*, save in the form of a vague cry of hope, which we know did not endure. Already in "Sartor" and "The French Revolution" the personal cast and the net outcome are fully revealed. Where the keen eye sees right at the first view, the presentation is as good as it is vivid; where it misreads either by prejudice or by hero-worship there can be no correction by the critical faculty. At best a later stage of temper may obliterate the memory of an older, as when he passes from the conviction that Cromwell is half-rogue to the certainty that he is wholly archangel, or when Peel, first seen as Sir Jabesh Windbag, is perceived to be a true statesman. But these are mere changes, as against a score of obstinate misjudgments. Burns and Johnson are laurelled in sympathy, Keats and Lamb

assent—to an almost morbid extent. It is even possible that, if his early anti-slavery and other radicalism had not become so general, some of his paradoxical writings might never have appeared."

<sup>1</sup> "Ay, but he was a pure-minded man, John Mill" (Crozier, p. 386). "A verri noble soul was John Mill, quite sure, beautiful to think of" (*Letters of C. E. Norton*, i, 496).

<sup>2</sup> D. A. Wilson, *Carlyle to Marriage*, 1923, p. 19.

condemned in lack of it, though Lamb's life was at least as heroic as Johnson's. Newton is dismissed as having "done nothing"; in another mood, the man who has mastered the forty-seventh proposition in Euclid "stands nearer to God than he had ever done before."<sup>1</sup> Great historic episodes are seen in the light of personal preferences; unchecked impressions are elaborated into pseudo-historical structures which often crumble at the touch of inquiry. Not from such a mind could we have a coherent philosophy, a sound ethic. Those who still call him a great moralist are they who still repeat his blind paralogism that the formula "Right is Might" is the negation of "Might is Right"—a sheer collapse of thought.<sup>2</sup> All opposition to his intuitions is dismissed with unreasoning passion, without an attempt to understand the contrary case.

If we sympathetically consider his crusade for a State remedy for unemployment, we find that he is zealously applying the formula of "Benthamite" utilitarianism—"the greatest good of the greatest number." Physical destitution is rightly faced as the supreme evil for the mass of men of normal character, and a relatively new social emergency—new, at least, on such a scale—is justly though helplessly declared to call for some new form of State action. But where other men had called for a recognition of utility as a principle of social action, Carlyle had spontaneously resorted to derision. In "Sartor" he affirms with empty sonority that utilitarianism as a moral principle is dismissed by all competent thinkers everywhere—a proposition which he was the more incompetent to make good because he never perceived the logical issue. For those who were satisfied with such bluster, his account of the "McCrowdy" philosophy as one for pigs is a triumph of satire, when to the awakened sense it is solely the satirist who is doing the grunting, that being his dialectical instrument; while the selection of the pig as a typically contented animal speaks ill for his vaunted power of observation. Courtesy, he declared later, is due from all men to all men;

<sup>1</sup> D. A. Wilson, *Life*, iii, 145, 391.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. D. A. Wilson reiterates the paralogism (*Carlyle to Marriage*, p. 315).

but to call a rival publicist a pig he had reckoned a triumph of wit and humour; and many devotees upheld him.

When, later in life, Carlyle finds that the workers who had elicited his sympathy by being out of work are so ill inspired as to be conscious of political rights to the extent of claiming votes, they in turn become the objects of his derision. Their duty, he feels, was to be contented with bread and butter, after the manner of the fabulous pig of his facetious allegory. Harboursing higher notions, they are perceived by him to be fools under the influence of beer, and are so represented. And the starving sempstresses now come no better off, by reason of Carlyle's discovery that ill-paid sempstresses were usually incompetent. Collated, the teachings of his lifetime figure as but so many outcries of so many contrary moods. The prophet who was always generalizing about the Cosmos could never coördinate his views of the little world around him. To coördinate was to be scientific, in other words, to be McCrowdy.

After the youthful drill in mathematics, which leaves no mental trace, all science, natural and social, is anathema; the elderly sage cannot read a page of Darwin, and resents even Goethe's "peering into nature"<sup>1</sup> as he resents Ruskin's interest in Art. Darwinism he never even tried to understand. He had himself pictured our ancestors as "hairy, flint-hurling anthropophagi"; but of Darwin and Huxley he could only snarl that they made out men to be "descended from monkeys." All predilections outside of the congenital bias are simply spurned; the mind cannot control or uplift the temperament. In the case of the prophet who most clamorously insisted on the spirituality of all mental life, it becomes indeed a question whether he is not in a quite exceptional degree to be explained by the sadly unspiritual factor of his lifelong dyspepsia, of which he was so sorely conscious as a handicap, but never as a determinant of his mental processes.<sup>2</sup> The recognition

<sup>1</sup> Espinasse, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> When, indeed, he declares, in his prime, that "ill health has cast a funeral pall over my life" (Espinasse, p. 71), he may be said to confess a knowledge that his doctrines are dictated by it. But he would never have conceded that in detail.

of that factor as accounting for many aspects of his work is indeed a consideration to be put in the name of critical justice, to say nothing of compassion. But alas for the resultant testimony to the supremacy of the spiritual in the prophetic consciousness.

How, then, shall we balance our account with him who never balanced his with us? It still needs balancing; for after the readers of his lifetime had cast it up for themselves he came into a new posthumous popularity as his books reached the new crowd of readers called up by improved national education. For all, the ultimate issues are really the same: What did he do for his age, or for posterity? And the answer is—just that service which he did for both by arousing and fascinating undeveloped minds. There is a terrible significance in the term “awakening” as applied to literature—it tells of such an immense reign of mental somnolence. To awake minds *is* a service. Carlyle came to his age like the Ancient Mariner, determined to hold it with his glittering eye; and if he talked to little philosophic purpose of the immensities and the eternities, which he concreted finally in a quite old-world anthropomorphic fashion, filling them with a God made in the image of that of his fathers, he spoke with a voice that vibrated, a “message” that reverberated.

Not truth of history, but a powerful and half-poetical stimulus to interest in history; not truth or depth of philosophy, but a rousing call to think on the problem of life; not light or guidance on the social riddle, but a passionate insistence on the need for them: these are the achievements of Carlyle—these, and the æsthetic thrills that he communicated by his best imaginative utterance. *C'est de la littérature*, says the French specialist, conveying dismissal; but literature is the most that most people can assimilate, and is surely better than booklessness, the state of “Muselessness” abhorred by Ruskin. Carlyle did that which was in him to do; did it, too, with groans enough to make us feel that he was not at all at his ease in Zion, that his sufferings were partly sympathetic. And when—warned by his example,

made more prudent by his errors, remembering his sheer physiological faculty for misery, the ground note of dyspepsia that runs through all his utterance and all the records of him—we see him as an item in that “Martyrdom of Man” which is perhaps as plausible a generalization as any other of history conceived as a totality of biography, then we may without profanity, so-called, apply to this unhappy spirit, as to the poets who sing what they have suffered, the tribute of the old Hebrew prophet, who, whatever he had in mind, was certainly not thinking of the “Christian Dispensation”: “Surely they have borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.....the chastisement of our peace was upon them, and with their stripes we are healed.”



# EMERSON

## I

SOME American journalist is alleged to have written that "Emerson never really made good after all: his writings didn't bring him in a thousand dollars a year."<sup>1</sup> This would seem to suggest that the English-speaking world was considerably in Emerson's debt at his decease, whatever dollars may have accrued to his family afterwards. It also recalls the maxim: *Paucis vivit genus humanum*—"the human race lives in a few." Most even of its civilized members read little beyond newspapers and novels; nowadays they do not even read sermons. The people who attend to literature on its higher sides—or, let us say, remembering that fiction may be high literature, its graver and more thoughtful sides—are not yet numerous enough to yield to the serious writer anything like the income of a fairly popular novelist, to say nothing of a star film "artist." And it is just as well, for his efficiency. His compensation, if he concerns himself about compensations, may be supposed to lie in a longer posthumous tenure of repute, whatever that may be worth to him.

And Emerson certainly has still his readers, though the librarians tell you that, like Carlyle and Arnold and Ruskin and Mill and Spencer, he is not nearly so much run upon as he used to be. These somewhat depressing statistics, indeed, raise the question whether the factor of cheap editions does not stand for a large public who now own their own classics, thereby enhancing their own comfort, inasmuch as they can thus read clean books instead of soiled ones. One in three of the buyers of those nice cheap editions, surely, may be

<sup>1</sup> Cited by Beatrice Grimshaw, in a story.

assumed to read them ; and as everybody is supposed to have his own Shakespeare, it may be that the luminaries of our youth really do go on shining for about as many readers as they had in their own day. But as to that we can only guess. Our business is to ask ourselves why they should still be read, and with what measure of approbation.

Thirty-six years ago we who had in youth delighted in Emerson had hesitations about the duration of his fame. He himself, with the real personal modesty which underlay all his oracular airs, and all his abstract propositions about genius and intuition and the supremacy of the intuitive faculty and method (which were for a time his own), once publicly protested that his reputation, such as it was, would one day be cited to prove the intellectual poverty of his time. It would be a mean tactic to adopt that humble self-estimate and put it as the real summary of the case ; and, indeed, such a tactic would recoil on ourselves, inasmuch as we were parties to his reputation. The summary would still leave him a great figure relatively to us. In truth, Emerson's modesty of self-estimate is one of his enduring attractions, a grace not attained by many of the other prophets of his age, who so largely ran to the pontifical and the infallible in their relation to their fellows. Modesty wears better than what our ancestors called "giantism." But if, putting aside all personal issues, we strive to reach a quite objective estimate of Emerson's "values," we may find in his modest protestation a hint of the direction to be taken. The law of relativity is perhaps even more important for ethics and æsthetics and criticism in general than for astronomy.

## II

To go over Emerson afresh is certainly to rediscover that, professing as he did to pronounce decisive judgments on all things in the light of an intuition from which there was no appeal, he not only propounded concrete contradictions but failed to reach a coherent philosophy. His general burden is Pantheism ; but a Pantheism so constantly controlled and

countered by non-pantheistic ideas that the pantheistic strokes finally rank rather as poetic flights than as prose propositions. When Emerson writes in the essay on THE OVER-SOUL that "the simplest person who in his integrity worships God becomes God," he really means nothing in particular, having already committed himself to the view that the "simplest person" was God already. And that, too, meant nothing in particular. The literary habit of ages, indeed, has given pantheistic formulas in general that kind of amphibious status in respect of which those who quote them pass as "deep" thinkers without running the risk of being supposed to abjure the popular God of the time being. Virgil set the fashion: *Mens agitat molem*—"A mind informs the mass." Put the formula to a test: ask, "Do you mean that the universe is to be conceived as a totality in which that which we call matter is animated by a Super-Mind or Life as animal bodies are animated by what we term mind or life, the whole being alive as an animal body is alive?"—ask this, and you usually set up a shuffling retreat. The pantheist is alarmed at the risk of being thought to say that rocks, trees, seas, animals, human beings, good and bad, stars and suns and comets and microbes, are particles or cells in an actual sentient organism. His airy formula was not meant to set up any such formally definite idea as that.

What, then, was it meant to convey? That the universe is in all its details *controlled* by a mind which in a super-human and super-natural fashion determines every act and movement as a man may guide a ship by pressing electric buttons, or a hypnotist control by his will the will of his patient? Does it mean that when the tiger leaps, or the rock or the avalanche falls, or the man slays, or sins, or saves, the alleged immanent universal mind is thus expressing itself, at all moments, for ever and for ever, through infinite space in infinite time? Or is it that the acts of all individual organisms are as the movements of the living cells in each of us, themselves unconscious so far as *we* know, but possibly conscious as individuals for *themselves*? The sincere pantheist must apparently mean something like this or that, or

nothing. But the sincere pantheist is hard to meet with. The usual pantheist wishes to be moral : he has moral ideals like other people ; he feels that if all acts are, as he suggests, to be conceived as equally divine acts, human morality is an illusory pretence. So, in a few moves, which are the same for Pantheism as for Theism, the Universal Mind is declassified either into "Something not Ourselves that makes for Righteousness," or into a God who has his preferences and his enemies, and who yearns to have friends among men.

These moves are never explicitly made by Emerson. Like Carlyle, in his quieter way, he is the Prophet, and will not debate ; he affirms. He will not reason with us, herein emulating the costermonger of the anecdote rather than the God of Job. His pantheistic propositions are many. In his first published handful of essays, entitled NATURE, we have alternately, or simultaneously, theistic and pantheistic pronouncements. Speaking of the need for newly vivid utterance of truth, he oddly writes :—

Picturesque language is at once a commanding certificate that he who employs it is a man in alliance with truth and God.....It is proper creation. It is the working of the Original Cause through the instruments he has already made.

That is presumably one of the dicta which moved early American reviewers (who in those days sometimes had the leisure to read the books they reviewed) to pronounce the new writer arrogant beyond modern precedent, and a framer of pernicious principles ; though it was perhaps meant to be only a variant of the Cartesian doctrine that all clear ideas are to be taken as true. In any case, it was not true in the special sense intended, and was practically very absurd. Emerson could certainly use picturesque language ; but so could numerous persons whom Emerson would decline to meet at dinner, and for whom he had hard names.

At times the Pantheism is fairly explicit, as here :—

There seems to be a necessity in spirit to manifest itself in material forms ; and day and night, river and storm, beast and bird, acid and alkali, pre-exist in necessary Ideas in the mind of God, and are what they are by virtue of preceding affections, in the world of spirit.

Then, after a quotation from the French philosopher who said that "Material objects are necessarily kinds of *scoriæ* of the substantial thoughts of the Creator," we get a rather hurried ending, with a flurried warning that words are apt to be misleading. And yet, had not the French philosopher's words been quite picturesque?

In the discourse on SPIRIT we are told that "Of that ineffable essence which we call Spirit, he that thinks most will say least." All the same, a number of things are forthwith said on the subject. "The noblest ministry of Nature is to stand as the apparition of God. It is the organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual, and strives to *lead back* the individual to it." Idealism, we are told, merely answers the question, What is matter? "Idealism is a hypothesis to account for nature by other principles than those of carpentry and chemistry. Yet, if it only deny the existence of matter, it does not satisfy the demands of the spirit. It leaves God out of me."<sup>1</sup> And so we are assured that

Spirit, that is, the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old. As a plant upon the earth, so a man rests upon the bosom of God.

Then what about the bad men? Are not they equally divine nurslings or products? Every one of these affirmations raises the challenge: where is it answered? In the Address to the Divinity Class at Harvard, delivered in 1838, there is a notable attempt to make good the ancient formulas of Pantheism with another ancient formula. As thus:—

Good is positive. Evil is merely privative, not absolute; it is like cold, which is the privation of heat. All evil is so much death and nonentity. Benevolence is absolute and real. So much benevolence as a man hath, so much life hath he.

Did those ancient verbalisms, one wonders, hypnotize all the young men who heard them? Was there present no simple lover of picturesque language who said to himself, "He is talking in his hat"? Such a one had his cue from

<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere Emerson affirms the contrary.

a subsequent passage in the address. The oracle of truth, it is announced,

is guarded by one stern condition ; this namely : it is an intuition. It cannot be received at second hand. Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I receive from another soul. What he announces, I must find true in me, or reject ; and on his word, or as his second, be he who he may, I can accept nothing.

Very well ; let us so treat those airy dicta about the non-entity of evil. They are themselves echoes from pagan antiquity, as are so many of the other doctrines of the young Emerson. The doctrine of the unreality of evil we find as early as the pagan Euclides of Megara, the contemporary of Socrates ; and we find it adopted seven centuries later by the Christian St. Basil. And neither of these, any more than Emerson, could raise it from the level of a sophism to that of a truth. If Euclides meant by Evil merely pain or sorrow, or that act or event which causes us these, he was not facing the ethical issue at all. If he meant wilful wrong-doing, as Basil must be supposed to have meant, he was negating the basis of ethics. In any case, he was framing a verbalism.

To say that evil is *non-ens*, and good *ens*, a thing, an entity, is to set up a verbal confusion and delusion. Neither the one nor the other, exactly speaking, is an entity. Each is, in the full sense of the term, a name for our estimate of an action, an aspect, a state of experience, each being regarded as the psychological and logical contrary of the other. Both terms, therefore, have the same psychological status. If we hypostatize our conception of "the Good," and nominalize all the aspects of it as a collective "Good," exactly the same process of thought and language must be applied to all the aspects we name Evil. For our mental world is a world of relations ; Good is no less plausibly to be defined as the absence of Evil than Evil as the absence of Good ; and the cognition of what is morally evil *as* Evil, in the senses given, is the very foundation of man's moral Cosmos. If that be dissolved, his ethic vanishes. When Chrysippus argued, much more plausibly than Euclides had done, that the presence of Evil is absolutely necessary to the recognition of

Good as good, he no more contrived to prove Evil a Good than Euclides had proved it non-existent. That we cannot cognize good apart from evil is no cancelment of evil. The fact is, as we say, part of the evil no less than part of the good. In man's moral world there are no absolutes: *they* are ideas of the abstract infinite which he can think only by negatives. It is only as a verbal makeshift of differentiation—as when we say that the Beautiful, in art or letters, is an absolute relatively to the merely more or less Reasonable of the literature of proof and persuasion—that the ascription of absoluteness to the finite is even transiently defensible.

### III

The best that can be said for Emerson in the matter is that in his "open and free" way he points us to the rebuttal alike of his doctrine and of the oracular mode of it. There is indeed reason to infer that by "intuition" Emerson often meant not what philosophy understands by that term—instinctive conviction as against conscious induction—but simply "independent opinion" as distinguished from unthinking assent to an imposed dogma. This is a misuse of a term by one who expressly condemned all lax use of terms. But in either sense his position incurs our challenge. In his own words: "What he announces, I must find true in me, or reject"; and we do that, say what he will, not by way of (what *we* term) intuition, but by way of reflection and reasoning: else is our rejection no better grounded than his affirmation. He has demonstrably paid himself with words, as when he says in his essay on LITERARY ETHICS that "All men, in the abstract, are just and good; what hinders them, in the particular, is the *momentary* predominance of the finite and individual over the general truth." The very next sentence gives the contradiction: "The condition of our incarnation in a private self seems to be a perpetual tendency to prefer the private law, to obey the private impulse, to the exclusion of the law of universal being." Observe, "*a perpetual tendency*," just after the phrase: "the *momentary*

predominance of the finite and the individual." And again, in the essay on CULTURE, we have this vital saying :—

The preservation of the species was a point of such necessity that Nature has secured it at all hazards by immensely overloading the passion at the risk of perpetual crime and disorder. So egotism has its root in the cardinal necessity by which each individual persists to be what he is.

These staggering self-contradictions are assuredly not salved by the sentence which shortly follows in the essay on LITERARY ETHICS :—

The vision of genius comes by renouncing the too officious activity of the understanding, and giving leave and amplest privilege to the spontaneous sentiment. Out of this, all that is alive and genial in thought go.

If, after the avowal that egoism is the predominating fact in Nature, the sense of truth is to be subordinated to that of the "alive and genial"; if genius is thus to be defined as a faculty that excludes reflection, genius becomes a solely æsthetic function, and there is no such thing as genius for right thinking, or justice, or comprehension. And again we come back to the intuitionist's own avowal: if his words are not true for us, we are bound to reject them. And that is not for him a mere momentary oversight, an accidental self-entanglement. He had written, with entire conviction, this passage in the early essay on SPIRITUAL LAWS :—

We have yet to learn that the thing uttered in words is not therefore affirmed. It must affirm itself, or no forms of logic or of oath can give it evidence. The sentence must also contain its own apology for being spoken.

After that, what avails it to browbeat us with phrases about the spontaneous sentiment, the intuition, the inward augury? The free man, who can think for himself, will not be so browbeaten. If I have an "intuition" that your intuition is false, or if I can further show that you put two intuitions which contradict each other, where do we stand? My sentiment of revolt against sophistry is as spontaneous as any of yours.

The contradictions of Emerson, put as they always are



with a geniality which disarms censure, raise for us that interesting problem: How does it come about that gifted men do thus contradict themselves? I shall not try to give an elaborately analytic answer, going into details under categories; but it may be suggested that two answers go some way towards stating the case. Firstly, as we are each a dualism of good and evil, egoism and altruism, so are we each a dualism of truth and error. Secondly, our thinking faculty is at best—that is, used carefully and scrupulously—an imperfect instrument, as Helmholtz declared the eye to be.

We discover the imperfections in each case by reasoned detection of error: that is the process and the vindication of reason, which affirms itself by contrasting truth with error as Good is affirmed by contrast with Evil. And the working conclusion is this, that just as we need careful self-criticism to keep us on the right path in morals, so we need it to keep us right in our most purely intellectual processes. We shall find this when we come to track the strictly intellectual processes of men devoted to such activity, as Mill and Spencer. And this care, this scruple, we owe to each other as much in matters of thinking as in matters of conduct. The ethic of the intellectual life is at bottom just the ethic of the daily life of human relations: "Do as you would be done by" is the broad generalization for both—nay, it is even more adequate for the intellectual life than for active conduct, since the former has fewer contingent qualifications—at least when we are considering the simple promulgation of truth. In this aspect, honest intellectual life is in the highest and purest sense democratic, since the true thinker makes no claim for himself that he does not accord to all. He stands by the law of equality of reason, rejecting every concept of intellectual privilege, every pretence of that arrogant prophetism which is the bane of so much nineteenth-century literature, littering its field with such masses of exploded asseveration.

And if Emerson is finally liable to any serious criticism, it is this, That he did not realize this constant need for comparing notes, for self-revision, for candid argument; or

that, partly realizing it as he did, he would hardly ever take any systematic pains either to guard himself from errors of heedless affirmation or to clear up contradictions when they were pointed out to him. Here he becomes, to the critical judgment, distinctly unsatisfactory. It was not a matter merely of shunning controversy, in that sense of the word to which it is often so disingenuously limited—that of aspersive controversy. Controversy need be no more quarrelsome than cricket. It can be played as a frank contest, by rules of reason. Where it is embittered, the non-combatant may fitly excuse himself. But Emerson in general simply refused to argue at all. “The children of the gods,” he said, “do not argue”—a sad substitution of pose for persuasion. He professed to enjoy Plato. Yet there he could have found the ideal, if not the practice, of intellectual intercourse: “the rendering and receiving of reasons.”

A young friend of uncommon capacity, who admired him to the end, has told how the sage bewildered him by the contradictions in his counsels on reading. The youth writes in his diary :—

Mr. Emerson said to-day that no one ought to write as Hawthorne has. I did not ask him what he meant. This is of no use with him. He talks in riddles, or, I should say, rebuses, so perspicuous and picturesque are his words, and one has to guess his meaning. ....To-day I am pretty sure he was referring to the nether side of human experience commemorated by Hawthorne, for he spoke in connection of King's<sup>1</sup> melancholy verse, and said he would not read [Hugo's] *LES MISÉRABLES* because the subjects and treatment are not cheerful. It cannot be that he, a guide in morals, persistently shuts his eyes to the only class of facts which makes morals necessary?

He tells me to read the Eastern theological books—bibles he calls them—and a long and starving Ramadan have I had with them; but how can *he* have read and endorse them? Their inspiration is of the pall; their language is of the grave; their message, what there is of it, is covered with vapours of the tomb.....The whole oriental literature, so far as I know it, is an elegy.

In our Bible, from Moses, desolate, broken with disappointment, and dying in despair within sight of his unattained goal, to the mysteries of the Revelations, there is the same shadow of mournful-

<sup>1</sup> A boy of seventeen, whose verse was “wonderful” for his years, but very sad.

ness. A bleak wind blows through all the history of the Kings and judges; Job is the story of doubt; Solomon shows us a brow of sorrow, a mind strewn with shameful memories and sullen remorse. ....Then there are the prophets. Their very word is a "burden"; their thunderbolts echo from skies heavy and black, and the lofty Ideal their lightnings momentarily disclose is a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief.<sup>1</sup>

And so on.

The gifted young man put these and many other considerations, drawn from later literature, to his mentor, and got his answer. "He heard me patiently," he writes; "watched my quivering lips a moment, and then said briefly, but with beaming glance: 'Very well, I do not wish disciples.'"<sup>2</sup> It is impossible to forbear the criticism that this, however amiably said, was somewhat unmanly, was intellectually unworthy, and was in any case unwise. At best, we must reckon it a manifestation of that chronic shrinking from comradeship, from hearty human intercourse, which made him so inaccessible not only to the over-soulful friendship of Margaret Fuller, but to the note-comparing zest of the elder Henry James.<sup>3</sup> He apparently could not at times help this aloofness, which, manifesting itself about the same time, in no less marked degree, in Hawthorne and in Thoreau, suggests a curious reaction against some of the conditions of democracy, unless it be one of the survivals of Puritanism. In this case it seems unfortunate.

The youth's objection, let us observe, might be to a considerable extent rebutted. There is a difference between mournful history and mournful fiction; and the Bible at least claimed to be history. History is the record of good and evil human experience, and as such ought to be known. The deliberate composition of heart-breaking fiction is another thing; and it is at least arguable that such fiction, which when done with literary genius is much *more* pain-giving than painful history can often be, is a thing to be shunned

<sup>1</sup> *Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson*, by Charles J. Woodbury, 1890, pp. 56-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> See Cabot, i, 275-8, 353-64. "I like man, but not men," is Emerson's own confession (p. 365).

by the sensitive. *ECCLESIASTES* is a book of sombre pronouncements ; but its generalized sombre summary of life is not pain-giving as is much of *LES MISÉRABLES* or of Meredith's *RICHARD FEVEREL*. It has the beauty of sad music, which yields us pleasure.<sup>1</sup> But, by analogy, gloomy poetry must be quite beautifully written if it is to justify itself.

Thus might Emerson have reasoned with his disciple, partly at least helping him over much of his difficulty. But Emerson, it is to be suspected, knew that behind his literary verdicts there was a weakness, which was his personal equation. The poignancy of contemporary tragic fiction distressed him ; and instead of putting the matter as one of idiosyncrasy—a confession of his personal aversion from tragic narrative as from all talk of ill health or despondency—he put it as a literary maxim, a criticism. Criticism is not fitly to be so framed. The just judge will not sentence a man out of dislike of his voice or aspect ; he must judge of the deed. I have known a man of good culture and good judgment to contend seriously that such a book as *THE ORDEAL OF RICHARD FEVEREL* ought not to have been written. But the same judgment would impinge on *LEAR* ; and there is a certain invalid quality in the critical temper which refuses to read even so utterly sad a story as Tourguénief's *AN UNFORTUNATE*, which is more profoundly mournful than anything of Hawthorne. As Emerson himself, in a higher mood, once wrote in a paper in *THE DIAL* : "He has seen but half the universe who never has been shown the House of Pain." And if, as he goes on to say in the same paper, sorrow "is superficial.....in the appearance and not in things," why fear to face it ?

*We* are left facing a spirit divided against itself ; an oracle giving counter-counsels ; a prophet who trips himself up. It is Carlyle over again : the man who would be a thinker, but can never reduce his conflicting feelings by solvent thought.

The outcome of Emerson's cheerful refusal to argue in

<sup>1</sup> Renan pronounced *Ecclesiastes* "charming," and "the only amiable book that has been composed by a Jew" (*L'Antechrist*, p. 101).

that case was that the young student did cease to be a disciple, though remaining an admiring friend. But there should not have been any question of "wishing disciples": that was not the intellectual issue; it was one of sociably and loyally seeking truth for its own sake. And he who professes to present truth should be ready to have his truth tested.

## IV

We must sum up that his was a genius of vivid glimpses, and of vivid presentment of them, rather than of brooding survey and patient combination. Like several of the other subjects of our present survey, he was infirm in the faculty of coherent *thinking*; and his work is thus in a measure vitiated for the thoughtful reader. Contradictions come very easily to him. After writing in the oration on THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR that "Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst," he actually tells us that "Books are for the scholar's idle times." He checks himself to say: "I would not be hurried by any love of system, by any exaggeration of instincts, to underrate the Book"; and again: "Of course there is a portion of reading quite indispensable to a wise man"; and yet again, in the riper essay on CULTURE, he even exaggerates in saying: "The best heads that ever existed, Pericles, Plato, Julius Cæsar, Shakespeare, Goethe, Milton, were well-read, universally educated men, and quite too wise to undervalue letters. Their opinion has weight, because they had means of knowing the opposite opinion." And yet he had written in his journal, at the age of twenty-four: "If you elect writing for your task in life, you must renounce all pretension to reading"<sup>1</sup>—a sorry confession of faith, to the literary sense.

Not to read is not to know the heritage of the mind; to miss the intercourse of the best and deepest of the race; to play the cave-dweller in the spiritual world. As he chronically shunned commerce with the minds around him, he shunned it, in these moods, with all the minds that ever

<sup>1</sup> Cabot, i, 291.

lived ; even then, however, bethinking himself of examples. In that mood he penned the judgment that English history is best to be learned in Shakespeare—a proposition equally unacceptable whether we believe or disbelieve that Shakespeare drafted the historical plays. And in the essay on LITERARY ETHICS he declares that “The student, as we all along insist, is great only by being passive to the super-incumbent spirit.” As who should say, The student is not to be a student : he is to pose as a seer.

From that view, at another time, he swings back, in the lecture on Shakespeare, to the doctrine that “Great men are more distinguished by range and extent than by originality” ; and in the late-published discourse ON BOOKS, while protesting that most of them “work no redemption in us,” he makes the just if trite remark that in the smallest chosen library “a company of the wisest and wittiest men that could be picked out of all civil countries, in a thousand years, have set in best order the results of their learning and wisdom.” And he actually produces, before it had become a fashion, his “hundred best books,” his list including the memorable proposition that Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus, Synesius, and Jamblichus “cannot be skipped.” He should have added, “but are to be dipped into,” which is all that he had ever done with them.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the very spirit of the library must rebel at the permission to read Goldsmith or Gillies on the history of Greece if you lack appetite for Grote.

But why the oscillation? Why the confident assertion in one mood that A is B, in another that A is not B? Is self-contradiction then the fruit of wisdom, when the prophet is not even conscious that he has contradicted himself? It is true that in his Journal, communing with himself on his need to renounce his Unitarian pastorate, he declares : “I hate preaching. Preaching is a pledge, and I wish to say what I feel and think to-day, with the proviso that to-morrow perhaps I shall contradict it all.” And more than once he brazenly

<sup>1</sup> “He would have been partly amused, partly vexed, to hear himself described as a profound student,—of the New Platonists, or of anything to be learned from books” (Cabot, i, 288).

makes that claim ; as who should say that in the pulpit you speak with responsibility, but on the platform with none. The sufficient answer to all this heady immoralism is that a man with such a code ends by not knowing when he contradicts himself, and has earned our disregard.

If we look for any balancing of this long see-saw of contradictory oracles, we find it, if anywhere, in a letter which he wrote in 1839 to the young clerical cousin who asked him for "a theory of Gibbon's genius." The answer, which responds to every scholar's sense of the greatness of Gibbon's resolve, his discipline, and his achievement, contains that acrid aspersion to which Emerson was always moved when he thought of certain of Gibbon's footnotes. What he could forgive in Shakespeare and Montaigne (against whom he never once makes the charge, though it is there so well earned) he always—perhaps by clerical heredity—made a theme for more or less gross vituperation of the anti-clerical historian. So completely does he lose intellectual balance in his fulmination that he actually pronounces Gibbon, in this connection, "dead to the meaning of nature." But he goes on thus to confute himself:—

You must give *this evil man* his due, and make it felt what condemnation his noble labour and perseverance cast upon scholars who have libraries *in which they never read* ; upon scholars who chide Gibbon, but are unable even to name his dignified studies, his original authorities, his great plan, and great execution of it. Our young men read reviews and newspapers, and smoke and sleep. It seems to me that erudition is not the tendency of the best minds of our time, as it was of Gibbon's and the following age. We incline to cast off authority, and of course *we think instead of reading*. But it at least behoves those who magnify authority in this age, to read and know what authority teaches. The example of this literary iconoclast ought not to be lost on them.<sup>1</sup>

As usual, the argument swerves. Obviously it behoves the professed iconoclasts, the defiers of authority, no less than the professed authoritarians, to realize how this great iconoclast made good his undertaking. But the tribute is

<sup>1</sup> Letter printed by its recipient, D. G. Haskins, D.D., in *Ralph Waldo Emerson : His Maternal Ancestors ; With Some Reminiscences of Him* ; Boston, 1886, p. 52.

the sufficient answer to most of Emerson's own flings against study and the life of books. And in many other ways he supplies the antidote to his unwisdoms, even to his practice. The youth who ceased to be his disciple has sought, in a magnanimous retrospect,<sup>1</sup> to make out that the inconsequence of Emerson's literary method is really a product of an "intelligent plan," fulfilling his counsel "to permit no ratiocinative steps to appear." It really will not do. To affirm, as does this writer, that the *ENGLISH TRAITS*, and the *Essays* in general, "march like a phalanx," is to say the thing which is not.

The cited counsel, if it were considerate and purposive, would be at best a sorry prescription for the publicist. Willfully to conceal the process of persuasion, to seek to dazzle instead of to persuade, is to substitute for the pure spirit of art the lower spirit of artifice, to approximate to the level of the showman and the spell-binder, to act as if the dazed applause of mobs bemused were better worth having than the alert assents of men in the full use of their judgment. But the simple truth is that Emerson does not and cannot conceal a ratiocinative process, because as a rule he has none to conceal. Did he habitually reason, he could not be so self-contradictory. At his best he does reason, without concealment, if with little effort at formal continuity. And when the over-generous panegyrist goes on to claim that Emerson's writing is a triumph of "natural methods of composition," and of "style to the construction of which he never gave a thought," he makes two grave critical mistakes. The method of coherence is just as "natural," to any one concerned about persuasion, as a practice which has either no method or a secretive one. On the other hand, it is a complete misconception to suppose that Emerson took no thought about his style. Alike by practice and precept he reveals that he thought of it constantly. And the plea to the contrary is inconsistent with the further (probably true) plea that Emerson's work "was to agitate into life the heavy New England torpor." The praise of Gibbon,

<sup>1</sup> *Talks with Emerson*, p. 151.



and the praise of the methods of science, give the sufficient answer to the special pleadings for the empirical.

## V

It becomes more and more clear, when all is said, that Emerson's maxims are the records of countervailing moods ; that he is alternately student and contemner of study ; that the instinct for range of knowledge and the craving for an intuitive philosophy of life are alike strong within him ; and that when there comes to him the vision that the toil of philosophy is really as unending as the toil of the scholar he seeks to buoy himself up with axioms about the Over Soul which but amount to saying that what emerges from or in the universe is the output of the All. "The universal soul is the alone creator of the useful and the beautiful : therefore, to make anything useful or beautiful, the individual must be submitted to the universal mind." As if, on his own premisses, the individual *could* possibly defy or elude the universal mind ; and as if the wrecker, the fool, and the evil-doer are not equally manifestations of the All.

To that issue we always return with him. Like Carlyle, he never balances his philosophic accounts. Like Carlyle, he simply could not : the thinking faculty in both has lacked due gymnastic. One declaims furiously against the evil in human things while protesting that the world is framed and ruled by a God of Good ; the other assures us that all things work together for good, and (with Tennyson) that God fulfils himself in many ways, hence the supreme value of freedom ; then obviously proceeds to explain alternately that evil does not really exist at all ; that it exists in virtue of the very constitution of Nature ; and that the workers of evil are such because they have nothing to do with the All-penetrating and All-controlling Spirit of Things. At the head of the Essays stands the quatrain :—

There is no great and no small  
To the Soul that maketh all :  
And where it cometh, all things are ;  
And it cometh everywhere.

And yet the common drift of the Essays, early and late, is just to demonstrate and insist on the perpetual contrast of great and small in Man and Men.

The critical verdict must be that he did not, and could not, reduce to coherence the divergent impulses of his thought on the problem of the universe, even as he could not attain to consistency in his judgment on many concrete issues; and that those of his disciples who still claim to find in him a coherent philosophy are but repeating his own escapes from criticism by way of a verbalism in which all clear thought is lost. One of them, the cultured, critical, and clerical cousin, who had been embarrassed by neighbours who were surprised at his inviting Emerson to lecture at the local lyceum, inasmuch as they "had supposed he did not believe in God," told him of this, and put to him the question: "Now, cousin Waldo, I think I am entitled to ask what you would have answered, if the inquiry had been made of you, 'Do you believe in God?'" And the answer, "very gravely and reverently made," was: "When I speak of God, I prefer to say It—It."

The cousin was startled, but explains that "in the conversation which followed I could discover no difference between [Emerson's views] and the commonly accepted doctrine of God's omnipresence."<sup>1</sup> Precisely so. Ordinary theists affirm God's omnipresence, *and mean nothing by it*—save perhaps what we mean when we affirm the reign of law in Nature. Yet, says the same writer, when Emerson "had learned of Miss Martineau's change of views, and her adoption of the dismal philosophy of Materialism, I felt oppressed by the dejection of Mr. Emerson's spirits and the sadness of his countenance. The one saw God nowhere, the other saw God everywhere." And yet we had just been told that Emerson preferred to speak of "God" as "It," which was precisely what Miss Martineau did. Was she less conscious of the Omnipresence of It than were her sage censors? What can we say of Emerson's Theism but that it was

<sup>1</sup> *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, by D. G. Haskins, D.D., as cited, pp. 53-4.

a traditionary verbalism, the eternal functioning of the Higher Charlatanism which passes for philosophy with the multitude, whose thinking is as truly hypnotic as that of savages swayed by the sorcerer?

When such persons, outgoing Emerson, with their traditionary insolence, their ingrained incapacity to think beyond the preliminary stage of an affirmation, permit themselves to asperse as "dismal" the candid avowal of more awakened intelligences that all personalization of the Universe has become for them an intolerable clap-trap, we are moved to comment that the eternal reign of verbalism is itself the most dismal thing in the human outlook. The clap-trappist has just informed us that he was "oppressed by the dejection of Mr. Emerson's spirits and the sadness of his countenance" over the news of Harriet Martineau's change of mind—or language. That is to say, they were "dismal" in the fullest and strictest sense of the term; while Harriet Martineau was living a newly cheerful life, in the Lucretian consciousness of having thrown off an incubus of imposture. There was not a less dismal soul on the planet than she, when she had emerged from her inherited theology of verbalism. But say "Materialist," and "the fattest hog in Athanasius' sty" is inspired to proclaim his sense of the moral and intellectual superiority of his own Polynesian faith, and the joyousness of his own dyspeptic soul.

It is not a question of the final thoroughness or precision of Harriet Martineau's or any other rationalist's metaphysic, or psychology, or physiology. The reconstruction of the web of our Universe after five thousand years of more or less inveterate intellectual charlatanism is not to be quickly achieved without oversight; and he who would meet the daggers and the poisoned arrows (ideas never to be associated with Emerson) of the race of the verbalists must have clear vision, a strong wrist, and a well-tempered blade. But no logical miscarriage even of Harriet Martineau can compare in ineptitude with that of the unending procession of theists who avow that their God cannot be thought of as a person, and yet always so think of their "It," shaming the spirit of

sincerity by their abject parade of confessed pretence, living intellectually and even materially by the never-lacking suffrages of unreason. Self-contradiction with godliness is great gain.

It is the distinction of Emerson to have played his part in the philosophic mummery with the naïve sincerity of a divided spirit, always humane and urbane, never theologically venomous, often percipient of the dominion of delusion, and, when so, ready with ringing words of protest against mummery, against the folly of prayer, against anthropomorphism, against Christolatry, against all the mindless acquiescences of religious life. It is his definite limitation to have been, nevertheless, by force of heredity and defect of self-discipline, too often a purveyor of self-contradiction, of spiritual confusion, of the coruscating miasma of false thinking which forever clouds the inner life of men.

But to say this is only to say of Emerson, with a difference, what falls to be said of some of the most ambitious philosophies of modern as of ancient times. If you apply to Kant the tests of ultimate consistency, you get from his immensely laboured system no better result. And if, haply, you find a thinker whose scheme reveals no positive inconsistencies, there is a heavy risk that you find him to be one who eludes vital problems. In a word, we shall have to content ourselves with confessing that, apart from the natural sciences, which are the collective outcome of the labours of thousands of mutually corrective minds—and at that are forever under revision—we shall find in all didactic work, be it historical, philosophic, or critical, flaws or fissures, great or small. There may be some works of art so nearly perfect that we may be all content so to adjudge them—which is a different thing from saying that there is any artist who is perfect through all his work; but a large and perfect body of teaching is so far a fantasy of hope.

Whatever may be the solution as to human self-contradiction in general, we seem forced to see in Emerson, as in Carlyle, a positive incarnation of contraries, and we are led to speculate on some physiological clue. We have noted his

capacity for aloofness, his retiral from proffered comradeship ; but at times we find him wearing quite a different aspect. Charles Eliot Norton, sailing home with him from England in 1873, found him

the greatest talker in the ship's company. He talked with all men, and yet was fresh and zealous for talk at night.<sup>1</sup>

It would seem to have been a matter of oxygen, of health, of the state of the circulatory system.

"His serene sweetness," continues Norton, "the pure whiteness of his soul, the reflection of his soul in his face, were never more apparent to me ; but never before in intercourse with him had I been so impressed with the limits of his mind. His optimistic philosophy has hardened into a creed, with the usual effects of a creed in closing the avenues of truth. He can accept nothing as fact that tells against his dogma."

And the good Norton has an uncomfortable divination that Emerson's "inveterate and persistent optimism.....is dangerous doctrine for a people. It degenerates into fatalistic indifference to moral considerations ;.....it is at the root of the irrational sentimentalism in our American politics, of much of our national disregard of honour in our public men"<sup>2</sup>—and yet other serious shortcomings. But, recognizing with Norton that Emerson "does not reason," we remember that from time to time he counteracted his overdone optimism with utterances of another flavour, impeaching the evil of which he had been denying the existence. He, too, is in his way two-sided ; and one of his chief merits is that on both sides he is attractive.

## VI

We turn, then, towards an estimate of Emerson's special "values," to which end we note his gifts and the conditions of their emergence. The hereditary element, the descent from a line of New England preachers, of men devoted to the arts of serious utterance and to habits of reflection, is put in the forefront by all the biographers, who have noted also in some

<sup>1</sup> Norton's *Letters*, i, 503.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 506.

of the women of the family that turn for incisive statement and finished form, and that bias to self-communion, which mark our man. His own poetic faculty might well have played on that problem of heredity, of which the broad facts so often struck him in his outlook on men. The moralist, bent on obtaining better results in conduct, seeks to reach the mainspring of action by making men think anew. But his hardest task is to do his own thinking with unflinching thoroughness; and this he will not achieve till he realizes what in his thought is traditionary or second-hand, and what is really reached by vigilant reasoning.

What we get from Emerson is the stirring appeal, or the striking quasi-philosophic phrase, not the process of reasoning. But the appeal is made with a singular felicity; and where the thought satisfies, the phrase fascinates. From first to last his thought is stamped with his gift of form, and with his gift of elevation, which is no less rare. In some hands the faculty for epigram generates a proclivity to the malicious, yielding distinction of form for thought that is always more or less uninspiring, never uplifting. Never does Emerson thus default, unless it be by way of a rare prejudice or defect of percipience. His natural poise is one of benignity, yet of dignity, unbending only to smile. More than once he remarks, in talk and on paper, on the literary importance of "the tone." Himself readily impressed by bearing, by the oracular, the cryptic, he quite spontaneously sought effects by these modes, securing by literary art the air of authority which for his clerical ancestors was more directly compassed by the conditions of the pulpit and the ministerial function. It was a good day for America when the young Emerson, forced to seek a livelihood by lecturing when the Unitarian pulpit was closed to him by the too heretically consistent character of his Unitarianism, began to make lectures that were quite as impressive as sermons, and much more lasting in their impression, being so much more interesting.

The Essays, from first to last, are revisions or distillations of the lectures, which are compilations of ideas from his

Journals; and we are sometimes moved to wish that there had been no distillation; that we had been given the discourse as it was framed for an audience, with the concrete touches which the essayist seems to have left out as being too homely for the high levels of mysticism which he sought to reach for his "high-brow" readers. That plan probably delayed his acceptance. His abstract quasi-philosophic propositions stand out coldly and hardly where in his discourse they may have had the effect of passing generalizations from simpler thoughts, in themselves more attractive. Viewing his course as a whole, we note a gradual movement away from the plane of derivative mysticism, which finally emerges only in aphorisms that are imposed upon an exposition to which they do not either logically or emotionally belong.

For the total movement is towards a more exact and a more coherent thinking, with a certain correlative slackening of literary concern for sheer form and tone. Living mainly by lecturing, he fulfilled himself by catering for his fellow creatures, even as Shakespeare had done in the Elizabethan theatre—a parallel which might have restrained his perplexity over what he calls the dramatist's "obscure and profane life," which the lecturer cannot "marry to his verse"; whereby he gave much gratification and unnecessary stimulus to the devotees of the Baconian theory, for which he has a certain measure of responsibility. His own formula, "There is no great and no small," might also have recurred to him at this point, if it was ever to be of any use. Where Shakespeare goes, "obscurity" becomes a nisnomer: the theatre of entertainment is constituted the temple of the muses. Remembering that, we shall never retort that the peddling of lectures to provincial or other audiences is unworthy of the scholar. It was Emerson's way of finding himself.

We know how he swung between the poles of his intuitions. While holding the faith that the spontaneous sentiment is its own certificate, he fills his journal with jottings of his segregated thoughts, and declares (this is the significant confession of his intellectual defect) that if correlatives or corollaries do not spontaneously present themselves to his

mind he will not seek for them : it would be putting an indignity on the spirit. With these sentences the lectures and the essays are built up. But the day comes when he groans over the truth of Carlyle's criticism that his Essays are as bags of small shot ; and he sees the Journal as a "rag-bag," which sets him praying for the faculty of continuity. And he even attains it, to the point to which it was in him to do so. The schema of the REPRESENTATIVE MEN imposes a measure of coherence and unity ; as to a certain extent does that of ENGLISH TRAITS, the book in which, with a theme at once large, concrete, and many-sided, he has more generally "come home to the business and bosoms of men" than in any other. Still, this work, which has been declared to "march like a phalanx," is permanently stamped with the limitations and discontinuities of his thinking faculty, no less than with his gift of phrase, of striking sententiousness, of vivid commentary.

These gifts are marked in the opening chapters, which will remain valuable in their kind, giving of England and its people a more memorable series of pictures than are yielded by any of the contemporary English accounts of America. But when we read in succession the chapters on Race, Ability, Manners, Truth, Character, we find that almost anything said in one chapter might as well have been said in any other. Each is a collection of vivid but detached notes, of striking observations, anecdotes, notions, estimates, criticisms, loosely grouped under headings, without any centralizing conceptions of the themes used as titles, any tested theory of causation, any vision of the forces of differentiation between societies. Scores of generalizations set us thinking ; but more often than not they leave us unconvinced by their hit-or-miss facility ; and always they set us asking, What exactly is there here that is special to the Englishman in particular, and not referable to Man in general ?

Of most stimulative and provocative value, perhaps, is the chapter on Religion, with its mordant criticism of Church and orthodoxy—a kind of criticism which, be it remembered, had been carried pretty far by native hands already ; and



which, again, was applicable to many other lands than England, but which was all the more effective when put with Emerson's sentence-making skill. Yet when we come to the chapter on Literature we are impressed at once by inadequacy and by the effort to focus under that general head questions that do not belong to it any more than to philosophy and science. On the side of literary criticism, Emerson's deficiencies are pretty generally recognized even by his panegyrists. Like Carlyle, he could see no poetry in Shelley, no merit in Jane Austen, any more than in Hawthorne; and in the *ENGLISH TRAITS*, in 1856, he is even more untrustworthy on this score than he was later. There he speaks of "the beauty of which Chaucer and *Chapman* had the secret." Twenty years later, in his *PARNASSUS*, with its thousand columns of anthology, he gives but two extracts from Chapman, and they are chosen not for beauty but for power. And, after disparaging Scott in the *TRAITS* as the mere producer of a rhymed traveller's guide to Scotland, he gives in the *PARNASSUS* twenty-seven of Scott's lyrics, which is somewhat excessive.

But the more serious divagations in the chapter on Literature in the *ENGLISH TRAITS* are in the handling of the intellectual side, where we see him applying his glass to a closed eye. He *will* not see any merit in Locke, or in Hume, or in any one who does not fly the flag of Plato. The judgments are not those of a critic who has studied and pondered, but those of a partisan of apriorism who is really not competent to pronounce on the critical issues. And then we get this generalization: "The English shrink from a generalization." It is not that he thinks the Americans have a better appetite for that fare: he is thinking of the Germans, who certainly, up to 1840, had been generalizing vigorously. He might justly have urged, too, that while Newton's work was one of generalization, his countrymen had not been his continuators; though they certainly had not shrunk from *his* generalization. And the critic might have pleaded ignorance of Spencer's early essays, and of the *PRINCIPLES OF PSYCHOLOGY*, published a year before the *ENGLISH TRAITS*. But he

knew of the existence of the mass of work done in geology ; and if he was to have an opinion about English interest in generalization it was his business to consider the case of Political Economy in general and the work of Ricardo in particular, as well as the output of Bentham and James Mill in the fields of law and morals, to say nothing of Godwin. But for these things he has no vision, though he hastily speaks of "great exceptions," such as John Hunter. As if the great generalizers were not exceptional in all countries !

The sufficient criticism on the critic is that most of what he says of "the English" is no more true of them than of any other aggregate, as abundantly appears when we note that, while Emerson was writing, Darwin and Spencer were well on their way to the greatest generalization of modern times, and Buckle was framing his sociological series, which, whether right or wrong, were a good deal more scientific in spirit and method than Emerson's own. In short, it is not Emerson's function to reach either objective truth or subjective consistency ; and those of his judgments which undertake to do so have little or no judicial value. His gifts are of another kind. What he thinks of Locke and Hume, or of race character, is of little account to us. When he confidently tells us that poetry is a matter of generalization he is but planting himself on the old confusion between poetry and ideation, and himself missing the psychic generalization that, while the poetic art can use the *emotion* of either a general or a particular truth, or perception, or conviction, it is by its own æsthetic nature and laws unable to expatiate much or far on the abstract, which yields so much less variety of emotion, while poetry has an unlimited field in feeling in general. And it is because his own executive faculty in verse, though really fine within a short range, is thus primarily delimited, and because he never patiently sought to train it *as* an executive faculty, that his small body of poetry has so small a measure of the concrete beauty which alone makes poetry lastingly delightful.

The fact is that by his own theory Emerson is in general doing the work of poetry in his prose ; and when he writes

verse he is seeking to do metrically just what he does in prose—that is, conveying *ideas* in *sentences*. If we are to put his outstanding faculty in a phrase, we may say of him what Nietzsche claimed for himself, that he is a master of the sentence. He is so when he best succeeds in his verse. But great poetry, as generically known, is a matter not of sentence-making but of singing; and though the fact that Emerson was in person entirely unmusical does not carry the corollary that he is unlyrical in his thought (Burns seems to have been congenitally defective on the side of music), it prepares us to find him narrowly restricted in his rhythm, and devoid of the faculty of continuous *cantabile* utterance. Indeed, his prose prepares us for that; it is, so to say, a collection of strings of brilliants; never for more than a little while an evolving stream of thought; never a tidal wave of continuous speech.

Yet, when we think of his work as a whole, we feel that Emerson by his prose functioned for his countrymen and for us, during at least two generations, very much as a poet may, lifting life above the commonplace without averting his eyes from reality, infusing the spirit of poetry into his vision of the actual, calling men to higher thoughts and feelings than those of the pursuit of the dollar, without ever pretending to scorn the economic and industrial side of things. On the dust of affairs he dewes cool patience; on the gloom of their troubles a radiant serenity. He is a poet without the singing voice, but with the singing soul; and much of the criticism he incurs as a thinker and teacher is qualified, if not turned, when we consider him in his Orphic aspect.

## VII

In saying this, we must not omit to recognize that in the ripest work of his mature period, the set of essays entitled *THE CONDUCT OF LIFE*, published in 1860, he attains to a measure of connected thinking hardly ever previously achieved by him, while he is significantly less finished in the literary quality of his sentences. The opening essay on *FATE* is

perhaps his best piece of sheer thinking. Nothing could be better than the tentative positing of the problem at the outset :—

In our first steps to gain our wishes we come upon immovable limitations. We are fired with the hope to reform men. After many experiments we find that we must begin earlier—at school. But the boys and girls are not docile ; we can make nothing of them. We decide that they are not of good stock. We must begin our reform earlier still—at generation ; that is to say, there is Fate, or laws of the world.

The keynote thus firmly struck is well maintained, and the practical as distinguished from the cosmic philosophy of the problem is soundly stated :—

History is the action and reaction of these two, Nature and Thought—two boys pushing each other on the curbstone of the pavement. Everything is pusher or pushed.....'Tis the best use of Fate to teach a fatal courage.....For, if Fate is so prevailing, man also is part of it, and can confront fate with fate.....The revelation of Thought takes men out of servitude into freedom.....We are as lawgivers ; we speak for Nature ; we prophesy and divine.....

Only when the thinker will be seer do we recur momentarily to the old self-contradiction. He must personalize the Infinite :—

Always one man more than another represents the will of Divine Providence to the period.

But this is a rhetorical flight of old habit ; the essay as a whole is sane and sound, fronting the totality of knowledge and deducing the law of wise life ; only in peroration do we get the old hymn to the inadequately imagined "divinity" : "Let us build altars to the Blessed Unity which holds nature and souls in perfect solution, and compels every atom to serve an universal end"—the old philosophy of words rounding off the philosophy of thought, with the old instinct for the rhetorical ending.

Let us, then, justly valuing the best of the thought, confess that the gift of Emerson is still potent. It is not merely that the master of the sentence is listened to, whatever he may say ; it is that the very concern for the definitive sentence is a lead to clearness of thought so far as the

sentence goes ; and where the thought is concrete, is a real judgment on a phase of conduct, the result is a potentially permanent appeal. And this, indeed, widens the influence of the sentence-maker, giving him jurisdiction beyond his rights. Emerson's philosophy will not hold for those who have thought out the problem ; but only the minority have done that ; there is still a large—a larger—audience of the unstudious. And there never was any question about the balance of his moral influence. In his moods of pantheistic optimism he might make light of the horrors of the slave trade, using, indeed, the very language of the slave-owners as to the inability of the negro to suffer as we think he does ; but when the national issue was forced upon him he stood by the right, and spoke without fear or favour.

In America he is still much praised for what were perhaps not the most genuine of his doctrines. Mr. Bliss Perry, who is a gifted, a vigilant, and a percipient critic, acclaims as "Emerson's Most Famous Speech" that on "The American Scholar," read in 1837. But the doctrine of that, that the American Scholar must make it his business to be truly American, is hardly the highest flight of Emerson's humanist thought. It was popular because it brilliantly handled a popular theme—the greatness of American destinies, and the need to rise to the occasion. But did it really elicit the literature it called for? Did it enable Whitman, who indeed was no scholar, to do any better his chosen task of celebrating the Americanness of America? *Could* it inspire even the American Scholar to be either deeper or wiser than any other scholar ; or qualify the man of letters of the Vast Republic to be a greater or a deeper artist than Ibsen in Little Norway? We, who have been so often chidden by Americans and others for John Bullism, cannot well find Emerson's best teaching in even the finest Uncle-Sammery. Surely he did a greater day's work when he read his lecture on the Fugitive Slave Law in New York in 1854, with its calmly stern impeachment of Daniel Webster. In the late lecture on "The Fortune of the Republic" every semblance of an American boast is balanced three times over by an unflinching

indictment of American deficiencies—which are equally our deficiencies, and those of all civilized nations, and are more worth pondering than any pæans to our pride.

No ; Emerson has the more virtue for us because he had other outlooks than that praised by Arnold, his “hold on happiness and hope” ; and because he was not, as Arnold thought, too “systematically benevolent.” In his tranquil way, he is as searching in his vision of what Arnold called the “idolatrous work” in the fabric of human things as many revolutionaries, and all the more convincing because of his serenity. These impeachments are not cries of passion, but among the most truly critical of his judgments. And, framing them with a higher wisdom than inspired such of his teaching predecessors as Benjamin Franklin, and casting them in a finer speech, with a subtler art than theirs, he has still a hundred messages for those whom the art awakens to new thought. And though that is not the last word of criticism, though the critique of truth refuses to be outfaced by the mere bluster of penmen who cannot think, still Emerson’s valid thinking is manifold and efficacious. His tonic sentences have not been superseded by later prophets ; his counsels to youth and to age are still stimulant, bracing, bettering ; his warnings to societies, to the nations, are not a whit less needful than when he was delivering them with his calm, benignant grace to the compatriots who listened, if not always with understanding, always with joy in his amenity and elevation. For his own saying of the civilization of his day remains broadly true of ours : “We are still but at cock-crowing and the morning-star.”

# RUSKIN

## I

OF the reputations of last century, in the category of prophets, perhaps the most deflated at the present time is that of Ruskin. There is the usual difficulty in knowing to what extent he is still read; but the booksellers say that the definitive edition of his works is in little request; and even the issue of a volume of selections from his best prose is rather a hint of attempted revival than a proof of unshaken vogue. Broadly speaking, the rising generation shows no such interest in Ruskin as was exhibited not only by the "cultured classes" so-called but by the clients of the public libraries throughout the last thirty years of the last century. Whatever be the prevailing cast of its ideals, the age of oil is not inclined to play the disciple to the man who detested steam and loathed railways and machinery. It can readily divine, if it cares to consider the matter, that he would have abominated motor-cars. Its prophets are of another order.

Yet no writer was more competently praised than Ruskin in the 'eighties and 'nineties. I have heard him extolled by my friends Patrick Geddes and John Graham Brooks with a warmth of sympathy and respect which any prophet might be proud to elicit from such critics of life. George Eliot avowed reverence in the act of imputing to him, with justice, arrogant absurdity in his pronouncements on political economy. She had a gift for reverence; but many others held the attitude. Of my old friend the late Thomas Burt, a man as sane as he was good, it is told by his latest biographer that of modern authors he most appreciated Thackeray and Ruskin, to the latter of whom, he said, "I owe more than I can ever tell." Thomas Burt was of the salt of the earth: his mere experience in this matter is an irreducible datum.

On the other hand, not only did the teacher lose his own faith in the fundamentals of his most eloquent propaganda ; he lost the faith of many in his wisdom. Few men of Ruskin's status, of his professed ideals, and of his moral faculty, have offended more often and more grievously against good sense and good feeling than he can be seen to have done again and again ;<sup>1</sup> and these offences his panegyrists are wont to pass over either with mild deprecation or with an undisturbed indifference which in itself raises a subsidiary critical problem. The appreciation of Ruskin is in terms of certain moral and critical standards and ideals, which he constantly invokes : how can those standards and ideals be dispensed with when he outrages them ? That is our preliminary problem.

## II

The warmth of the admiration once felt for Ruskin, and the mildness of much of the critical censure of his offences against good sense and feeling, may be set down to the essentially emotional nature of his influence. Of course his fierce interest in social reform made a wide appeal ; and his romantic aspect as the Rich Man who really cared for Lazarus was a great advertisement ; but his vehement writing was its own voucher. Of all the prophets of his age he was the most constantly high-strung, the most habitually prophetic. Carlyle can be seen, as it were, climbing the tripod and superinducing the Sibylline contortions ; Arnold plays the pontiff with serenity, at times with humour. Emerson is never febrile. Ruskin is hardly ever otherwise ; and that is at once his strength and his weakness, impairing his thought and heightening his attraction. From his outset his voice vibrates with fervour ; and it was that electric charge, turned to the output of an abnormal eloquence, spontaneous though zealously calculated, that determined the nature of his general acceptance.

De Quincey, in a classification that has been often exploited,

<sup>1</sup> By the admission of his attached friend C. E. Norton, Pref. to *Letters of Ruskin to Norton*, 1905.



divides literature in general into two orders : the literature of Knowledge and the literature of Power. Perhaps the facts he had in view could have been more accurately indicated by naming the categories the literature of Feeling and the literature of Thought ; or, more strictly, the literature whose appeal is predominantly to Emotion and that which mainly appeals to Judgment. In all those dichotomies alike, of course, there is overlapping, simply because all ideation has *some* emotional adjunct, and in all literary appeals to emotion there must be some use of knowledge and some implication of "reason." What stands out is a predominance of one or other factor or bias. But to call the emotional process a display of Power, and so to imply a lack of Power in the literature of Thought, drably labelled Knowledge, is to obscure the psychic facts. There need be no lack of power in either scientific or philosophical writing, if Power be understood to mean gravity or depth of appeal to the understanding ; and for the mind which welcomes such appeal there may be little Power in a declamatory fervour that for others is overpowering.

What is certain is that the emotional appeal has the wider acceptance. It may be that, as Wordsworth sings :

The Gods approve  
The depth and not the tumult of the soul ;

but the thing is otherwise viewed by the majority of men and women. Whatever may be the proportion between the born Aristotelians and the born Platonists, there can be no question of the plurality of the emotionalists over the thinkers. And even among thoughtful people, among lovers of ideas, there is a nearly universal readiness to give higher marks, so to speak, to the fervid and eloquent publicist than to the quiet thinker. In all eloquence there is something Orphic, stampeding the many and charming most of the rest insofar as it is not directed against them. And though Ruskin never attained to any great effect in poetry (here illustrating the rule that the greater masters in prose are never great masters in the rhythm of verse, even as the chief

masters in verse rhythm, be they Shakespeares or Miltons,<sup>1</sup> are never equally great in prose),<sup>2</sup> there is in his often exquisitely cadenced prose something akin to the psychic excitation of fine verse, albeit it faults in the very effort to secure such excitation. It thus seeks, as Arnold said, to do more than prose should ; yet it thus achieves more than Arnold's prose ever can.

If only the constant didactic purpose of Ruskin's writing did not so instantly bring it under intellectual or philosophical rather than, or as well as, æsthetic standards, there could be little dispute as to his primacy in the sheer faculty of intensive prose utterance in the English literature of his age. One of our literary lawgivers, Professor Saintsbury, has taken the singular course of allotting the primacy alternately and equally to Ruskin and to Carlyle, in two separate pronouncements in one work. To Carlyle, as a writer, he ascribes "the very *sword* of Goliath,"<sup>3</sup> affirming that

if his position as the greatest man of letters of the century be disputed.....any competitor who is set up can be dislodged by a fervent and well-equipped Carlylian without very much difficulty.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, concerning Ruskin as a writer, though he does not allot to him even the spear of Goliath, the Professor declares<sup>5</sup> that

the more one reads him the more one feels inclined almost to let him go uncriticized, to vote him the primacy in nineteenth-century prose by sheer acclamation.

In one sense these bi-frontal oracles save trouble to the operator and to his audience : you pay your money and you have your choice. But they do not ultimately redound to

<sup>1</sup> Kingsley, in a lecture, confidently affirmed that "Milton's matchless prose style.....grows naturally from his matchless power over rhyme and metre" (Intro. Lectures delivered at Queen's College, London, 1840, p. 36). It suffices to ask, Whence, then, did Sir Thomas Browne derive *his* matchless prose style? Browne's outlasts Milton's for lovers of prose.

<sup>2</sup> This might seem to conflict with the fact that Chaucer and Jonson, to name no others, had high faculty in prose. But those poets, whatever be their endowment as poets, are not to be classed as supreme masters of verse rhythm : their prose *as such* is rather more distinguished for rhythm than is their verse. Arnold is an interesting case of a writer highly esteemed in both orders ; but probably no careful critic will pronounce that his prose, considered as great expression, equates with his poetry.

<sup>3</sup> *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 1896, p. 239. <sup>4</sup> *Id.*, p. 237. <sup>5</sup> *Id.*, p. 396.

the critical credit of the lawgiver, inasmuch as they compel the layman to arrive at a judgment for himself. In this case it is not very difficult. Carlyle has a number of fine prose passages, and a general energy of movement and force of diction which mark him as a powerful prosist. The prose of SARTOR RESARTUS was in its day no less arresting for young and impressionable readers by its vivid literary force than by the newness of the content. But his is rather the strength of effort than the assured play of gift; his earlier work shows no original spontaneity; and often the sense of his effort is oppressive and wearisome. Ruskin, on the other hand, undoubtedly took great pains in his youth to polish his periods, with the result, by his own later confession, that his earlier books are apt to be found strenuously over-written. But in his case facility and strength were ultimately co-ordinated, and his later writing is as easefully firm as that of Carlyle is muscle-bound.

The truth here is a paradox. With all Ruskin's devotion to "art" in the abstract, and Carlyle's professed repudiation of the ideal, the fact remains that Carlyle up to his maturity does much more of artistic prose *for its own sake*, uses much more of conscious artifice, than does Ruskin, who is always absorbed in his theme, however much he attended to style. This consists with his natural endowment. Of the two, Ruskin is distinctly the born writer; and any prosist ought to be able to see as much. What dispute arises, either between different critics or as between different moods of critics not given to self-analysis, is a matter of mixing or confusing didactic with æsthetic issues, in the manner of Arnold and too many other English connoisseurs.

That Carlyle had "more sense" than Ruskin is the short and simple solution that commends itself to some straightforward people, impressed by the fact that Ruskin, the professed art-critic, could see no merit whatever in the work of one of the most rarely gifted of modern artists. Not even the folly of the artist,<sup>1</sup> in bringing his action for libel against

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps there was a "method" of advertisement in the madness of Whistler's suit.

the critic, could obliterate the folly of the criticism sued on. But even the appeal to common-sense standards will not avail to upset the æsthetic decision as to the literary gifts of the two prophets. Carlyle offended good judgment and good feeling as grossly, though not as often, as ever Ruskin did. His "Shooting Niagara, and After," to say nothing of his vilification of Lamb and Keats, will match Ruskin's criticism of Whistler. But the issue can be put on broader grounds. Carlyle saw fit to conclude his magnificent dithyramb at the end of his "French Revolution" with the assertion that that Revolution was "the end of the dominion of imposture." There is no need to argue the question whether that assertion is true or false, seeing that it is declared to be false by the whole of Carlyle's later teaching. He was proclaiming and exclaiming-at the dominion of imposture to the last day of his life; and his so-called "Last Words" are an indictment of prevalent imposture in the life around him. To claim that Carlyle, as contrasted with Ruskin, stood for good sense in his general attitude to life is to take up an untenable position. Like other people, Carlyle could see the folly of the scheme of the Company of St. George. But it was no further from sanity than his own dream of curing unemployment by the wholesale deportation of the unemployed to virgin soil or by political regimentation at home.

On the other hand, Ruskin had at least as wide a vogue as Carlyle with the mass of unstudious people interested in "culture" who take to writers as others take to preachers, according a reverent ear and a docile faith in the teacher's inspiration. The volume of "Precious Thoughts, Moral and Religious," compiled from his works for American readers in 1866 by Miss L. C. Tuthill, reveals his status as a kind of Super-Governess, capable of putting all sorts of knowledge in a vivid and fascinating way, and making all manner of scientific information seem "moral and religious." In a word, the gift of fascinating speech won for him a prophetic prestige as definite as any acquired in his age.

## III

What, then, were Ruskin's "values"—to use a word that has been much abused in pseudo-philosophy, but which may serve to connote the factors of literary appreciation? First and foremost, and always fundamentally, that of the genius for utterance, the flaming eloquence, the mastery of sheer expression—a force of appeal that is independent of wisdom, being potentially just as energetic for error and folly as for insight. Obviously it is not, it cannot be, wisdom that sways and fascinates men in numbers. For wisdom—humanist wisdom—is appreciable in perfection only by wisdom; were wisdom abundant, in the terms of the case, it would not be remarkable; and to say that it is scarce is to say that most men are imperfectly qualified to tell what is mentally admirable in a multiform body of humanist teaching. He who stirs men in multitude to admiration is not the thinker; new and true thought is admirable only to those who think newly and truly, and they are not numerous enough to make a wide reputation; though a new scientific truth, recognizable as such by the always increasing number of instructed men, is by them sooner or later imposed on the respectful acceptance of the majority.

What thrills and stirs a generation is the gift for emotional utterance. Rousseau was very far indeed from being the wisest European writer of his age; but no one else, not even the wittily wise and ever-sparkling Voltaire, still less the brooding Condorcet or the sagacious Turgot, sent through his world so moving a thrill of fascinated interest and eager response as was roused by the Genevan of disordered temperament and ill-trained judgment, with his fervid and harmonious prose. To the gifted instrument, of course, must be conjoined the moving theme; men and women are not to be deeply stirred in large numbers by abstract inquiries, by a scientific sociology, by any intellectual analysis. They are stirred where their feelings are involved, and Rousseau is but one of a number of prophetic figures who by their entire careers prove that the faculty of excitation and fascination is

often if not always a sinister gift of the Fates, carrying neither a capacity for wise life nor a faculty for happiness in its own exercise. It is, indeed, a scientific absurdity to say that genius, which is specific faculty raised to an abnormal power, is in itself a form of insanity; but it is painfully true that it is apt to be associated with insane disturbances. It is this that makes genius as scientifically interesting as it is æsthetically fascinating.

From the first, Ruskin, with his special gift, was able to make one comparatively sure appeal, with many that were unsure, to his age. Alone among the prophetic figures of his time, he was preoccupied with the world of æsthetic beauty. To that Carlyle had little relation. We must, indeed, be heedful how we estimate men's susceptibilities on this side; Mr. Cotter Morison has denied to Macaulay all faculty of response to external nature, when he had before him, if he had looked for it, Macaulay's note of how a great scene in the Himalayas moved him to tears. John Mill and his father, preoccupied as they were with intellectual interests, made a strong stand for the preservation of a piece of rural beauty in England that was menaced by a new railroad. Carlyle had a kind of moral æsthesia, so to speak, that made him in some ways responsive to Nature. But he was avowedly contemptuous of the Fine Arts as such and of all enthusiasm for them; and Allingham has recorded that he was quite unrecognizant of the beauty of flowers. Emerson, in comparison, had much feeling for the beautiful; but he in no way specialized his thinking on that side; and his sense of the beautiful in literature was precarious. Arnold, finally, had little to say on the arts, and we shall see how his sense of the beautiful in poetry was always being deflected by his concern for edification, which made his æsthetic criticism chronically unedifying as such.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps advisable to point out that the distinction insisted on here and hereinafter between *æsthetic* (or technical) and *ethical* categories and judgments is not at all a censure of an intellectual or analytical procedure in æsthetic criticism. The confusions over those points are endless. (One is discussed in the writer's *Hamlet Once More*—the blunder, namely, of assuming that a criticism positing intellectual inconsistency in a drama is an improper

Ruskin, indeed, largely exhibits the same unhappy proclivity of the English criticism of his age. From first to last he is always seeking to graft moral or religious issues upon æsthetic. For that reason a number of artists always contemned him, declaring that he had no eye for Art as such, but was always playing the Super-Nursery-Governess, teaching the reader to have good thoughts about things, to see the hand of God everywhere, to elicit sermons from stones, and to derive moral improvement from the contemplation of landscape. It took him a long time to realize, if he ever did truly realize, the fatuity of his doctrine that good art is the sure accompaniment of good national life,<sup>1</sup> and that only a good man can paint a good picture—a delusion constantly impelling him and others to the labelling of bad pictures as good, and vice versa. The fiasco over Whistler is a historical landmark in a critical career which from the first was inspired by a doctrine divided against itself. The mental twist which made that fiasco possible becomes in itself a problem for the study.

The truth seems to be that many people who meddle with æsthetics make themselves, so to speak, æsthetically half-witted, by what, for emphasis' sake, we may vulgarly term "mixing their drinks." Coffee and cigar, kept apart, form a satisfactory gastronomic duet; but, unless the adventure-story-writers fable, cigar-ash dropped in the coffee produces a bad soporific. Thus we find accomplished literary men, like Lowell, sitting down to study the literary problem of Hamlet and straightway, on a hint from Coleridge, playing the myopic moralist, pronouncing that the "lesson" of the piece is the lamentable unreadiness of the Prince to assassinate

imposition of "scientific" ideation upon an æsthetic process.) Æsthetic processes of *judgment* are not mindless or anti-rational; and *all* criticism that pretends to seriousness ought to be intellectual, logical, rational. The Canon of Consistency holds for all. But a vicious confusion arises when ethical tests and standards are applied to æsthetic matter *as such*, or, again, to an economic analysis which in the terms of the case is outside of ethics. And there is something essentially *unethical* (though many ethicists fail to see it) in imposing ethical tests where they are irrelevant. It is then the ethicist who becomes immoral, because he is "iniquitous."

<sup>1</sup> The falsity of this he expressly concedes in *The Two Paths*; but he never seems to realize that his whole way of diagnosis is a delusion.

his wicked uncle. They thus turn a tragedy into a tract, and a literary criticism into a sermon, even in the act of repudiating such methods. And, once such a thing has been done with literary impressiveness, half a generation obediently goes hoodwinked. If Ruskin's art homilies promoted an interest in art, they must also have tended, as some artists said, to make or keep some people colour-blind—if such a figure be scientifically permissible. His panegyric on Holman Hunt's picture, "The Light of the World," entirely justified those critics who said that he praised the wrong things, or praised for wrong reasons. And his dispraise of Hunt's oddly unspiritual picture of "The Scapegoat" quite failed to right the balance.

But all this, it is safe to say, does not dispose of Ruskin's efficacy as a prophet of Art in an age and country in which the spirit of Art was in general ill nourished. His whole propaganda for Turner was a powerful stimulus in a fortunate direction, however much he might misstate the issues by crediting Turner with a moral passion for accuracy when he was exhibiting magnificence of imagination. That mispraise was an outcome of the "moralic" twist imposed on Ruskin's mind from its start, partly by the culture atmosphere of his age and country, but more intensely, it is probable, by the pietistic training given him by his mother, a Bibliolater and Calvinist who seems to have come straight from the sixteenth century. But from his father's side, though there also there was pietism, came a real love of the beautiful; and probably no writer of his age did so much both to elicit and to stimulate that function in the minds of a multitude who would not otherwise have been so stimulated.

That he confused his teaching from the outset, by imposing his inculcated Godism and Scripturalism on every process of æsthetic judgment, is only too obvious; and where saner critics missed the perfect synthesis of the two-fold problem of truth and art, he could not reach it. Much of his acceptance certainly came, as Hamerton suggested, from the habitually non-artistic direction of English feeling about art. He captivated many by making them feel that their religion was somehow



artistic at bottom, and that pleasure in art must be at once pious and moral. That he led many young painters "into a wrong direction" must be conceded to Hamerton,<sup>1</sup> who had been among those misled. But, after all, there are many issues raised by that term "wrong"; and on a balance even Ruskin's misleading may not have been maleficent.

Mr. Collingwood testifies that his influence for good as Slade Professor was enormous; and Mr. Harrison has borne similar testimony as to his influence at the Working Men's College.<sup>2</sup> So much of sheer stimulus must have wrought well in some degree. What was special to the child, the element and functioning of his genius, gave an electric force to his every utterance. Even as Wordsworth ultimately obtained for all his work a special reverence of reception by at once appealing to and eliciting the love of external Nature which is either active or dormant in many, and so came to figure for myriads as a hierophant even in bad verse, so Ruskin, appealing in his different way, acquired the status of a prophet alike by his bad and his good teaching.

Such composite influences, we say, are evanescent, were it only by reason of the instability of the compound, the element of the false in it that reveals itself to ultimate analysis either of the æsthetic or of the didactic part. And so omnipresent is this element of decay in the mass of the literary and prophetic output of the past that there is something to be said for the course of simply taking it for granted, dismissing the bad matter after a glance, as the inevitable alloy in human performance, and concentrating on what seems to be the permanently good. But surely the full purpose of the humanistic study of the past is to learn wisdom from its

<sup>1</sup> *Thoughts upon Art*, ed. 1889, p. 31. In his own case, Hamerton testified, Ruskin's influence "was not merely evil, it was disastrous" (*Autobiography*, p. 128). He had in view the doctrine of "copyism," from which he later revolted, and which he held to have undone him as an artist. Ruskin, however, might have retorted that in his chapter (*Modern Painters*, pt. ii, sec. i, ch. i) "Of Ideas of Truth" he had expressly taught that "the representation of thoughts" is "the real and only important end of all art," to which representation of facts is but the necessary gateway.

<sup>2</sup> See also the testimony of Mr. Lowes Dickinson, who taught under him, and saw in him "a great artist" (*Letters* [coll. ed.], i.)

miscarriages as well as from its achievements, so that we may haply have less miscarriage in the future. That holds good alike of the æsthetic and the didactic sides of the performance in view ; and the Coleridgean tactic of refusing to admit the presence of the spurious until homage has been paid to the sound is but a way of hardening in his hostility the observer who has been only too painfully conscious of the presence of the unsound. The atmosphere of docile worship which came to surround Ruskin did him no good ; and he will never be rehabilitated by brazening out his blunders and his perversities. But once they are fairly faced, in correlation with his gifts, the vision might conceivably avail somewhat to guard the gifted of another age from playing over again the dreary drama of vain prescription and vainer malediction.

It may be, indeed, that the Law of Waste is so far immanent in the nature of things that what we term Progress must indefinitely continue to be a mere residuum, the conservation of a little truth from a vast play of conflicting "ignorances and madnesses," as Ruskin himself once put it. The multitude is never ready for sheer truth : it is susceptible chiefly to appeals which go wide of truth. But none the less the search for truth is as essentially the law of sane life for the student of the social process as it is for the students of the natural processes. To say, with Wordsworth, that we live by Admiration, Hope, and Love, is not to say that there can be no Reason in control of these. The very statement is in terms of Reason ; and the right acceptance of it is an aspiration to make our love, our hope, and our admiration function on higher as against lower levels. Any lower ideal is either a vain optimism or a vainer pessimism.

#### IV

At the outset of his literary career we find Ruskin as intuitively confident on everything<sup>1</sup> he has to say as he was in his last years of sanity. It is not that he professes to know

<sup>1</sup> In *Preterita* he tells how in his boyhood, when his tutor lectured on early English literature, "though I had never read a word of any before Pope, I thought myself already a much better judge than Mr. Dale."

everything: often he avows ignorance—frequently with a complaint that other people have not made the necessary studies—but wherever he claims to have studied he feels perfectly sure that he has reached the summit of cosmic truth, and delivers himself in the mood of Moses on Sinai.

In the introduction to "The Seven Lamps of Architecture" (1849) he sets out with the explanation that "while a man's sense and conscience, aided by Revelation, are always enough, if earnestly directed, to enable him to discover what is right, neither his sense, nor conscience, nor feeling, is ever enough, *because they are not intended*, to determine for him what is possible." And then, instead of the rational inference—if any be possible when you set out with a claim to knowledge of the intentions of Omnipotence—we have the proposition that men's failures, "more especially in matters political," are mainly due to the fact "that the inquiry into the doubtful and in some sort inexplicable relations of capability, chance, resistance, and inconvenience, invariably precedes, even if it do not altogether supersede, the determination of what is *absolutely desirable* and just." That, by implication, can be much more easily ascertained. We are accordingly exhorted, if we would escape social catastrophe, to "endeavour to determine, as the guides of every effort, some constant, general, and irrefragable laws of right—laws which, *based upon man's nature, not upon his knowledge*, may possess so far the unchangeableness of the one, as that neither the increase nor imperfection of the other may be able to assault or invalidate them."

All the later self-confessed failure of Ruskin to dominate his age as he sought to do is implicit in that imposing frontage of vacuous dogmatism. In the terms of the case, we are to *know* what is absolutely right, and that *knowledge* is not to *be* knowledge. Our code is to be based upon our nature—without our having any *knowledge of our nature*. Eliminate the explicit self-contradiction by substituting any other term for knowledge; make the proposition seem to be sense as best you can, and you are still left with the insensate assumption that it is a relatively simple matter to make quite sure as to

which of the manifold conflicting elements in human nature are not merely permanent but rightly determinative of the absolute right or wrong of any political course that may be proposed before we even know whether it is practicable or impracticable.

It seems strictly impossible to frame a more futile safeguard against social disaster, which is what Ruskin professed to be doing. The men who wrought the French Revolution went to work exactly as Ruskin prescribes. Lenin and his associates have done as much in Russia. They were all perfectly certain that they knew, in terms of "our nature," exactly what is absolutely desirable and just. True, Lenin did not conform to Ruskin's prescription in the matter of asking guidance of God; on which head the prophet proclaims that "There is nothing so small but that we may honour God by asking His guidance of it, or insult Him by taking it into our own hands." But, to say nothing of the confident Deism of most of the men who wrought the French Revolution, the Puritans of our own Caroline age missed no opportunity of asking for God's guidance; and all sections alike were as sure of having obtained it when they came to a deadlock of opposition as was the King who was in opposition to them collectively.

The formal Theism of Ruskin's early doctrine is simply part of its general childish subjectivism. He speaks of "insulting God" by taking our course into our own hands. All the while, that is of necessity what he is doing, since he is just settling for himself what is God's will. "God," he proclaims, "is one and the same, and is pleased or displeased by the same things forever": which simply means that what pleases or displeases Ruskin is pleasing or displeasing to God. Of course Ruskin at that stage is a devout believer in Revelation, and professedly derives his knowledge of God's nature from the sacerdotal and other details of the Pentateuch, though he subjectively interprets them with his usual Sinaitic confidence. But he is quite sure of the literal bearing of the curse against the idolatrous Egyptian of antiquity on the "idolatrous Romanist" of to-day; and though he admits

that the latter is a less pressing danger, he strategically commits to an Appendix his conviction that the "lying and idolatrous Power" of the Church of Rome "is the darkest plague that ever held commission to hurt the Earth." Hence—observe the practical application—"we never can have the remotest fellowship with the utterers of that fearful Falsehood, and live"; "we have nothing to look to from them but treacherous hostility"; and "exactly in proportion to the sternness of our separation from them will be not only the spiritual but the temporal blessings granted by God to this country."

All this was literally and practically meant. "I faithfully and firmly believe," the prophet goes on, "that England will never be prosperous again, that the honour of her arms will be tarnished, and her commerce blighted, and her national character degraded, until the Romanist is expelled from the place which has impiously been conceded to him among her legislators." That is to say, the extension of the franchise to Catholics was an impious act, sure to bring England to ruin. In support of that pious pronouncement he cites a passage from an essay by the Rev. Dr. Croly, the most interesting thing about which, for a posterity that does not study that author's works, is the close resemblance of its prose to Ruskin's own of that period. It has the same qualities of tingling earnestness, of lucid and forceful construction, and of spontaneous cadence—thus reminding us that there was really plenty of mere good writing of bad matter in his day, chiefly, perhaps, by ecclesiastics; and that what primarily differentiated him from competitors was not his literary faculty but the fact that it was mainly spent in recommending less hopeless convictions than that about the inevitable doom of England by the wrath of God for giving votes to Roman Catholics.

Had Ruskin gone on posing as the prophetic mouth-piece of political insanities like these, there would have been small question latterly of his status in literature. Adapting Garrick, we may say that "to write like an angel and think like poor Poll" is only to make eloquence more clearly

recognizable as a gift independent of wisdom. And if we are to adopt his own tone towards all who differed from him on economics, we may say that that deliverance on Catholic enfranchisement, embodying the worst opinion of his time, is, to use words of his own, "disgraceful to the human intellect."<sup>1</sup> He lives by later and better work. His larger and saner interests saved him, as it happened, from commitment for ever to the fanaticism he had imbibed at his mother's knee, and he lived to write far greater prose on far truer inspirations. We know how his rabid anti-Catholic fanaticism—*itself*, we may note, the due correlative of the fanaticism which still inspires so many Catholics—found a sudden euthanasia. One day in 1858, as he told late in life,<sup>2</sup> he heard a "little squeaking idiot" in a Waldensian chapel telling a handful of old women and louts that "they were the only children of God in Turin"; and the æsthetic and the moral side of him—for there was no humorous side—revolted once for all against the creed of sectarian fanaticism. His friend, Charles Elliot Norton, comments that "It was a hard, an unsettling revelation, and from the effects of it I believe that he never wholly recovered"—this while describing him as thenceforth a "sceptic."<sup>3</sup>

That account of the matter tells little beyond the fact that in America, as in England, the literary discussion of the problem of the claims of "revelation" was in that day, as indeed it is still, a matter of evasively conventional phrasing. What Norton meant was that Ruskin had ceased to believe in the Christian religion, of which he had been a fanatical adherent. In terms of the reigning conventions this ought to have meant that he had passed outside the pale of respectability. But Norton, who had gone through the

<sup>1</sup> *Unto this Last*, ch. iii, near end.

<sup>2</sup> As Norton notes, he gives two different accounts—one in *Preterita*, III, i, end; the other, above cited, in *Fors Clavigera*, vol. vii (1887), letter 76, p. 104. In the *Preterita* version the "squeaking idiot" is less contemptuously described; but the avowal is quite definite that "that day my evangelical beliefs were put away, to be debated no more"; though it is claimed that the Turin experience "only concluded the courses of thought which had been leading me to such end through many years."

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of Ruskin to Norton*, i, 72.

common experience of educated men in these matters, though as a Professor he could not afford to debate them, was aware that there were two parties in the world of thought, as had begun to be the case in the eighteenth century, and that to be any kind of Deist was to remain sufficiently religious for purposes of social insurance. And a Deist Ruskin remained.

What he had been able to realize was that all the concrete creeds, including that in which he had been brought up, are tissues of hallucination. What he never seems to have asked himself was whether his God-idea was any less a hallucination than the thousand creeds that had been attached to it. A "sceptic" in any strict sense he never was; Norton, himself grown a rationalist, uses the term merely as a more amiable equivalent for "infidel," which was still the regulation epithet in non-academic circles, in America as in the Mother-country. Of Ruskin's case as a thinker the summary is that, like Carlyle, Emerson, and Arnold, all trained in the Christian creed, all figuring as prophets for their time, he had found that creed to be incredible. For professed Christians the circumstance should be noteworthy.

In 1861 Ruskin writes to Norton, quoting from Socrates "a glorious bit of anti-materialism" (Xenophon, *Memor.*, i, 4), and adding :—

This is all well, but it is to me a fearful discovery how God has allowed all who have variously sought him in the most earnest way to be blinded—how Puritan, monk, Brahmin, Churchman, Turk, are all merely names for different madresses and ignorances; how nothing prevailed finally but a steady, worldly-wise labour, comfortable, resolute, fearless, full of animal life, affectionate, compassionate. I think I see how one ought to live, now; but my own life is lost—gone by. I looked for another world, and find there is only this, and that is past for me; what message I have given is all wrong; has to be re-said, in another way, and is, so said, almost too terrible to be serviceable. For the present I am dead silent. Our preachers drive me mad with contempt if I ever read or listen to a word; our politicians, mad with indignation.<sup>1</sup>

None of the prophets, none of the Agnostics, has put

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Norton*, i, 118-19.

more vividly, in a sentence, the experience of disillusionment, or the ethical and intellectual indictment of the creed found incredible, or the life-code of rational humanism. But the very wording of the confession shows that the recognition had come too late in his intellectual life to permit of his building up for himself a rational philosophy. He partly worded the gospel of sane life; he could not live it. The very avowal of past error is put with a threat of a terrible new predication to come, a recovered and redoubled certitude. This spirit may taste of bitter awakenings, never of a really teachable humility on great problems.

v

A fanatic, in a fundamental sense, Ruskin always remained. He stood confessed a victim of religious delusion; but a religious standing-ground he must have; and he never altered his prophetic tone, his airs of inspired certitude. Towards the former sharers of his other-world delusions he was "madly" hostile, as he was towards all who would not toe the line of his code for the actual life. Shaken forever by fevers of alternate hope and despair, he took towards Atheists a tone of compassion, as of one throned on serene heights, which in many cases duly moved *their* derision. The riper spirits among them gave him a truer compassion than his own, seeing in him a victim of his past, of his physiology, of his endowment.

His very gifts condemned him to perpetual subjectivity. It was said of him by Mazzini that he had the most analytical mind in Europe; and in a sense that is true. His mind did play analytically on whatever roused his interest—the details of landscape, of architecture, of drawing, of handicraft, of ugly surroundings, of heedless conduct, and its consequences; into all these his critical faculty dived with a piercing zest, which in his electric prose communicated to his readers a hundred new sensations and reflections. But always the process is visibly limited by the self-willed temper; always it is an external analysis of perceptions to which there is



joined a pietistic or ethical addendum that has a merely subjective connection ; a statement of the relation to life of a temperament which can never analyse its own total relation to the totality of things ; can never contemplate as matter for analysis the problem of its own certitudes, though a total doctrine of life is its professed subject matter.

The test of his thinking power should have been the problem of Beauty, which has been the theme of so much æsthetic inquiry and of so much obscurantist fulmination. Ruskin could hardly fail to see that it is *sui generis* ; that the sense of Beauty is not analysable into perceptions that are non-æsthetic, and still less into a process of moral judgment. Even his proclivity to find moral reasons for all æsthetic rightness could not blind him to the primary crux. He assumed to solve it, however, by referring the concept to God, positing the perception as one which could derive only from the æsthetic experience of Deity.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that this naïve solution has been expressly championed by Lord Balfour, by way of counterblast to the Theory of Evolution, should withhold us from treating it as an illustration of amateur "early Victorian" thinking, innocent of philosophic preparation. Even Spencer, putting it aside as beneath discussion, long strove fruitlessly to find the roots of the æsthetic sense in that of utility ; and though he ultimately posited it, rightly, as a function above ethico-utilitarian tests, he did not reach the true standing-ground, formulated in the concept of "Creative Evolution." But Ruskin's contentment with a mere theistic formula remains one of the proofs that his thinking faculty was fatally misdirected from the start.

In one of his letters to Norton he writes of "the distinct duty which I feel to cultivate the rare analytic and demonstrative faculty of me, rather than the enthusiastic one which has been common to so many."<sup>2</sup> But what Ruskin took to be analysis is more often than not a mere creation of figments—a retailing of the fancies set up in him by a given phenomenon.

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Painters*, part i, sec. i, ch. vi.

<sup>2</sup> Letter 176, vol. ii, p. 127.

In his youth he always connects his æsthetic emotions somehow with "the honour of God"; later, the association varies, but always the emotional process rules the logical. With his gift for utterance he is often a true critic of the use of words; but on a whim of fancy he will set a false above a true reading.<sup>1</sup> When he finds hidden meanings in Hebrew texts, or in the names of characters in Shakespeare's plays, he is not analysing anything, and he demonstrates nothing. He is tracing a series of spontaneous notions set up in him by a mere process of association of ideas; and his blind faith in his intuitions led him to lay the same stress on those mere vagaries of fancy as he did on the outcome of an actual analysis of a process of social causation. When, perhaps on an early suggestion that he might be made Professor of Poetry, he attempted to prepare a lecture on the subject, he had to confess that he totally failed to reach any new ideas. And even in matters of social causation, where he did in a measure trace sequences, it was rather by way of moral reaction than of intellectual inquiry. True analysis is a procedure of thinking. Ruskin's processes always tended to be first and last by way of feeling, guessing, imagining, whether rightly or wrongly. And, right or wrong, he always felt he was infallible.

The ostensible recognition of the folly of his early fanaticism on religious politics never made any visible difference to Ruskin's confidence in the absolute rightness of those of his intuitions which survived, or of the new ones which arose on new emergencies. He was never, in his predication, confessedly ashamed of having been grossly wrong. He never hesitated to impute wickedness to forms of action and opinion far further from wickedness than had been his own attitude on Catholic enfranchisement. In art matters he ceased to learn. He could not pause to ask himself whether the new phenomenon of Whistler's art, recognized by many whose judgment should have given him pause, did not call for scrutiny and patient brooding. A sense of his infallibility in all art

<sup>1</sup> E.g., the letter to D. G. Rossetti on Dante. *Letters* (coll. ed.), i, 190.

matters was part of his æsthetic constitution. It is interesting to remember that he claimed for himself what admiring critics accorded to Carlyle on the human side of nature—a peculiar power of seeing, infinitely rarer, he complacently declared, than the power of thinking. Alas for the rarity of the thinking that can realize what thinking and seeing are.

The outcome of Ruskin's idiosyncrasy of finding divine law in every æsthetic and moral impression he came by, is that on many of the most important abstract and concrete questions alike he has laid down flatly contradictory judgments. What he analyses is his momentary sense of relations ; what is never analysed is his sense of absolute rightness. Thus we learn from him that the main function of architecture is to exhibit sculpture, and that yet the architect who so employs architecture is lost ; that mere mass proportion is mere workmanship and not architecture ; that the faithfulness of workmanship is its supreme merit ; that fidelity to the thing seen is the measure of art ; that faithfulness of imitation, nevertheless, is not the essence of art ; and so on and so forth, every change of impression being imposed as absolute with the same dogmatic certitude, till a critical reader reaches an entire distrust of the whole process, and turns to seek a guidance that will at least appeal to his reason by consistency.

Challenged over a self-contradiction, Ruskin pontifically explains—and this just after the experience at Turin—that he is always right ; that when he said Tintoretto is always right *he* was right : because when Tintoretto is patently wrong in his work it was because some boring people had intolerably interrupted him ; in which case it was absolutely right for him to paint absolutely wrong. It is not out of knowledge that the swaggering explanation is given : it is pure wilful fiction. What the prophet cannot for a moment conceive is that he really *does not know* how or why Tintoretto committed certain artistic peccadilloes. He *must* be right in his divinations as to all artists, in his certitude that Gainsborough was badly trained and Tintoretto merely “put off his play” by bores. As he does not happen to have felt the colour gift of Morland, Morland is absolutely excluded by him from the list of “real”

English painters. "Whenever the reader is entirely shocked by what I say," declares the prophet in 1859, "he may be assured every word is true."<sup>1</sup> The passage in which he replies to the critics who praised his language but challenged his judgment is a thing to be remembered. The criticism, he proclaims, is the exact reverse of the truth :—

For my "language," until within the last six or seven years, was loose, obscure, and more or less feeble ; and still, though I have tried hard to mend it, the best I can do is inferior to much contemporary work. No description that I have ever given of anything is worth four lines of Tennyson ; and in serious thought, my half-pages are generally only worth about as much as a single sentence either of his or of Carlyle's. They are, I well trust, as true and necessary ; but they are neither as concentrated nor so well put. But I am an entirely safe guide in art judgment.

It recalls a line in Chapman : "Humility hath raised me to the stars." These mock humilities, paraded to prove real infallibility, are frequent in Ruskin. That any critical mind should ever have been persuaded by such vociferation seems unlikely. To meet it now by recalling his own confession that he had quite ignorantly said utterly untrue things about certain Italian Renaissance painters when he knew nothing about them, but that it all mattered nothing because his readers had been equally ill informed—to retort thus is quite unnecessary. The prophet who can thus vociferate and thus divagate can only by fortuity be a good guide in anything ; and the dispassionate summing-up of Ruskin is that at certain points he did see clearly and truly ; that at many points he moved both friendly and hostile readers to new realizations alike of good and evil, beauty and ugliness ; that he stirred stagnant waters and moved many to seek for a better life ; and that nevertheless and all along he misguided many for lack of fundamental wisdom, and left many others sadly distrustful of all the confident gospels of their time, his included.

A calm study of his social gospel at this date yields no new estimate. Like Carlyle, he had no vision of the fundamental fatality of population, the need for birth control,

<sup>1</sup> *The Two Paths*, Appendix I.

though he did once in a way see harm in large families. Instead of facing the crux, he vilified those who did, in particular Mill. His outlook on economics yields us only the perception that, like Carlyle, he was vividly awake to social evil, and keenly felt that economic science ought to be made to help towards remedies. With all his virulent denunciation of those who offered no cure, he could but perorate, like Carlyle, on the importance of "the giving of employment at fixed rates to all who are capable of work."<sup>1</sup> At points he put economic truths which the ordinary practitioner either did not see or did not see the full force of. But his own economic analysis, obtruded with a swaggering arrogance which at once calls up, by contrast, the courtesy and modesty of the scientific thinkers, is often angrily illogical; and his vituperation of economic doctrine is nearly always so.<sup>2</sup>

The bulk of the dispute over him on this head, I take leave to say, resolves itself into a mere matter of definitions. The claim, put by him and backed by others, that political economy commonly so-called is not truly *political* economy inasmuch as it is not a code of State policy, is simply a battle over terms. Call the subject-matter simply economics, or the economics of trade, or "catallactics," and the debate is over; save for the return attack on Ruskin's social doctrine as not being a *political* economy either, but an *à priori* *ethical* economy. The teacher who denounces machinery and railways, and repudiates the principle of self-government, is neither a practical nor a scientific politician in any current force of *that* term. He is the prophet of an ideal, right or wrong, or both.

Economics is a technique—the technique of a socio-commercial process. To bring ethics into the statement of

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Norton*, i, 188–90. Compare, in the *Political Economy of Art*, ch. i, the pronouncement: "You complain of the difficulty of finding work for your men. Depend upon it, the real difficulty rather is to find men for your work."

<sup>2</sup> One sample of his private utterance may serve: "Ricardo's chapter on Rent and Adam Smith's eighth chapter on the Wages of Labour stand, to my mind, quite Sky High among the monuments of Human Brutification; that is to say, of the paralysis of intellect fed habitually on grass, instead of Bread of God" (Letter of 1862 to Dr. John Brown, coll. *Letters*, i, 416.)

the *process* is to perform the same kind of mystification as is attained by imposing ethics on æsthetics. And when half the world is stupidly astray over the mere technique of the process, and immeasurably worsens life in consequence, it is a vain fury that demands the dismissal of the technical discussion in favour of an ethical free-fight over the moral and æsthetic rights and wrongs of every step in trade and handicraft. An æsthete, of all men, ought to recognize that there is as much value in light as in heat.

And while the moral fervour which calls for social betterment is in itself a forwarding force, the rage which vilifies all other men's outlooks is itself an element of positive evil. To say of Adam Smith, as did Ruskin, that he had a calf's head which he could not even carve upon whinstone, is merely to make the reader ashamed for the teacher. Harriet Martineau he pronounced foolish and vulgar: she never sank to such vulgar folly as that. To call the people of England "a rotten mob of money-begotten traitors" is but to elicit the comment that he is a fool who plays the prophet to such, especially when he goes on to formulate a creed of faith in the goodness of God and the essential nobleness of human nature. The feverish undertaking to gather a handful of elect for the regeneration of the whole by means of a St. George's Company was in sum a revelation of the unchanging egoism, even in altruism, of the prophet's relation to the world about him, an assumption that the imposition of his private will and rule was the one way to improve society. It was the last word of self-worshipping infallibilism. And the end was, as with Carlyle, despair and bitterness of soul, save for temperamental revivals of feeling; a total failure to accept tranquilly the total lesson of life; a gloomy proclamation of felt darkness after a lifetime's asseveration of possession of spiritual light.

We must not, indeed, put as a test of the truth of any doctrine its measure of what Arnold called "stay and comfort." Such a test is no more admissible in the science of life than in æsthetics. Let the truth be told though the heavens fall, when it is truth we are seeking. But when

prophets claim to be giving men a doctrine by which to live, and not merely fail of that but lose the very taste for life in themselves, there is no escaping the verdict that by its own tests their teaching as a totality is null.

## VI

It did not need the last tragically-clouded years of Ruskin's life to justify the sad verdict of his friend Charles Elliot Norton :—

I have never known a life less wisely controlled, or less helped by the wisdom of others, than his. The whole retrospect of it is pathetic: waste, confusion, ruin, of one of the most gifted and sweetest natures the world ever knew.<sup>1</sup>

In his collection of Ruskin's letters to himself, Norton heads his section 1873–1893 thus <sup>2</sup> :—

After my return from Europe in May, 1873, ten years passed before I again saw Ruskin. They were years of grave change and sad experience for him.....The intensity of his sensitiveness to immediate impressions, the passionate ardour of his feelings, the habit of uncontrolled expression reacting to increase the temper from which it sprang, continued to aggravate the bitterness of his resentment against the evil of the world and to deprive him of peace of mind. His unsettled religious convictions failed to afford him solid spiritual comfort and support. His writings, largely devoted to social questions, exposed him by their manner as well as by their doctrine to harsh criticism, by which he was wounded and embittered.....He stood alone and like a prophet to whom his people would not hearken.

Yet, adds Norton, there were intervals "when all the sweetness and generosity of his nature displayed themselves in their incomparable abundance." But the painful picture just drawn had reference both to his personal and individual and his public and literary life. Ruskin's private and personal life may be left in the obscurity to which good taste has always been inclined to relegate it: there is difficult matter enough in his literary career to occupy the critic anxious for a balanced estimate. To those who realize sincerity only in terms of vehemence of asseveration, and who think sincerity a rare virtue, it must always be difficult

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Leslie Stephen in *Letters of C. E. Norton*, 1913, ii, 291.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. ii, pp. 63-4.

to appraise his values soundly. To learn that sincerity is as common as conceit, and that there are better ways of persuasion than those of Moses and the Pope, is part of the necessary preparation for the task. The great discoverers of truth do not cry aloud that they are infallible. Copernicus and Newton and Darwin are content to give us reasons for thinking as they do, and so they bring us to do it. It is the prophetic fury, the sense of inspiration, that turns the modest and winning Ruskin of private intercourse with those he loved into the Mahdi who for a time fascinates many and ultimately wearies most.

That sombre spectacle of the last days of Carlyle and Ruskin sets us upon wishing an impossible thing for them, which may yet be possible for their successors. "Suppose," we are moved to say to them, "that the world is really as perverse as you feel it to be; granted that it will not obey you and put you in the chair of power; what then? Once upon a time you took a real interest in simply learning things. Why not try that as a change from preaching and prophesying? You have preached the gospel of work to others: why not live it? It need not mean silence for you. Just find out the truth about something in the past or present, and set it forth for what it is worth, letting the world take it or leave it: you will have had your excursion, your exploration, your discovery, and your entertainment; you will have attained some new knowledge, which is, as it were, to become young again, whether the world is interested or not." A vain counsel, of course. The prophet by profession must dree his weird. He must go on prophesying, commanding, laying down the law, or he becomes nought in his own eyes. "His not to reason why": he is the mouthpiece of the universe to all the rest, telling them what they ought to do. When they are non-recipient he can but scold and turn away.

And our comment is that it is a happier thing to be born in the age of science, and to be ruled by the spirit of science, of which the law is perpetual reconsideration. The Age of Religion, broadly speaking, is the age of ignorant belief that truth is possessed. The Age of Science begins with the



perception that truth is a matter of perpetual new discovery, every formulation of it yielding, after patient scrutiny, to new and truer formulation. That, surely, should mean an endless widening of the interest of life. The difficulty is to apply the new conception, developed by the history of what we term the natural sciences, to what we call the human sciences. It must be equally true of them, if Evolution as a whole is a true conception. The general law must hold good over all; new thinking, loyally done, will yield new truth. But the prophets are the last men to be convinced, though they are for us a salient part of the evidence. We see their religious certitudes falling from their hands. Carlyle's Theism, convulsively clutched at, from time to time, to the end, ceases to be for him a stay. Ruskin's early Bibliolatry passes into a Theism that is visibly half-hearted, threatening to be dissolved in a fierce reactive sense of the futility of the beliefs he sees held around him. But he who has passed his life in a state of exalted consciousness of having sure knowledge of truth from within cannot face the cataclysm of the recognition that it is only a relative thing, a relation between him and his environment, subject to perpetual revaluation.

Will the prophets of the next age show themselves to have mastered the lesson? Nay, are we and our posterity to go on living under the Dispensation of Prophets, new or old? I have been censured for saying that a prophet is a person whose language is strong and whose theory is wrong; but is the generalization so far out, whether we consider the humanists, the theologians, or the politicians? Our generation, like the last, has its prophets; and they certainly retain the old symptoms. Some of them are novelists, some dramatists, some just publicists at large. Some, having as novelists cultivated their imagination, suppose that they have imbibed the spirit of science, and that they apply it. But they retain the mark of the prophet; they are much more concerned with asseveration than with proof, with preaching than with thinking. Mr. Chesterton is quite as conscious of being spontaneously and infallibly right as were any of his

predecessors ; and Mr. Wells, a seer and framer of other worlds by professional habit, has (unless latterly) no qualms about the relativity of his vision of the one he is in.

Yet the spirit of the scientific age is asserting itself ; and the cult of the Prophet has ceased to have the reverential aspect of old days, even for the assentient. The novel cannot very well put on the solemnities of the older prophecy ; and its function is subtly reactive on its message when it undertakes the prophetic rôle. And the surviving faithful of the old cults, seeing as much, may haply retort on us that the Prophets of the past were the more reverently viewed because they were in truth the greater figures. And doubtless they were. They are personalities of a larger stature than those who have undertaken to wear their robes. The men they moved were not weaklings, and the work of their hands was at least more massive than that of their successors of the moment. Ruskin's prose, at its best, remains a fine thing in itself ; and it will cause him to be remembered, not by his hierophantic dogmatisms and ritualisms, whether ethical or æsthetic, but by his unsurpassed transcriptions of the airs and visions of beauty which passed through the tense and delicate strings and senses of his quivering structure. Neither Tennyson nor Carlyle could outdo him there.

But the issue is not one as to the relative stature or accomplishment of the teachers of the past and the present. It is one of the acquisition of a new wisdom by the race. To feel great is not to be great to the eye of reflection ; arrogance is weakness. The vastly widening world that is being progressively revealed to a science that is content to go on merely learning, professing no inner light as to the control and causation of an infinite and eternal universe, is one in which all human pretensions to such interpretation become as the speculations of animalculæ in a drop of water. The Renaissance, it has been said, meant the discovery of Man. The Age of Science is, or should be, that of the discovery of the laws of man's world and of his powers of adaptation to it. And that discovery is not to be made by the intuitions of prophetic fervour. It will be attained by no one man's

vision, but, like the greater truths of all the sciences, by the loyal labours of many men bent singly on truth, and, further, by the endless experimentation of organized society.

For such a science no true service will finally be lost. Nothing that can be brought to the task by genius of any order is unavailing in so far as it stands for true vision or right feeling or fine expression, all three of which are boons to us all, from whomsoever they come. Ruskin gave us these. And where he darkened counsel by unteachable self-will and arrogant fulmination, humanist science will find in him not a theme for malediction such as he bestowed so widely and so fiercely, but one of the aspects of human frustration immanent in the totality of Nature which it is the business of human wisdom calmly to diagnose and, so far as may be, countervail.

For Ruskin, on the total retrospect, is a spectacle of suffering, even as is Carlyle; and only the boundless censoriousness of both can arrest the impulse to compassion. Curiously enough, Ruskin in his last days is more censorious than sympathetic over the prevailing key of self-pity and lamentation in the posthumously published correspondence of Carlyle. Of the Carlyle-Emerson letters, edited by Norton in 1883, he writes to Norton :—

C's [letters to Emerson], like all the words of him published since his death, have vexed me, and partly angered, with their perpetual 'me miserum'—never seeming to feel the extreme ill manners of this perpetual whine.....the perception in all nature of nothing between the stars and his stomach—his going, for instance, into North Wales for two months, and noting absolutely no Cambrian thing or event, but only increase of Carlylian bile.<sup>1</sup>

The censure is strictly just enough, but it comes from one who had throughout his life sinned in the very fashion thus condemned. Ruskin's own letters, like Carlyle's, chronically abound in protests of weariness and inhibition, making us feel in each case that the writer is rather a mental invalid than a mental athlete. In Ruskin's case, over-kind parents weakened the child by their over-solicitude as obviously as

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Norton*, ii, 189-90.

in Mill's an insufficiently kind discipline wrought overstrain. As he himself put it, in a letter of 1868 :—

I have often thought of setting down some notes of my life, but I know not how. I should have to accuse my own folly bitterly; but not less, as far as I can judge, that of the fondest, faithfullest, most mistaken parents that ever child was blest with, or ruined by. For myself, I could speak of my follies and my sins: I could not speak of my good.....In my good nature I have no merit, but much weakness and folly. In my genius I am curiously imperfect and broken.<sup>1</sup>

Ruskin's reaction on life, half the time, is pitifully neurotic. "Of all things that oppress me," he writes<sup>2</sup> to Norton in 1871, "this sense of the evil working of Nature herself, my disgust at her barbarity—clumsiness, darkness, bitter mockery of herself—is the more desolating. I am very sorry for my old nurse, but her death is ten times more horrible to me because the sky and blossoms are dead also." The rage of pain under the unlovely aspects of things is the correlative of the rapture over the lovely; and there has been no discipline to develop sane endurance. Forever the pendulum swings fatally between the extremes. Insanity is but a stage in such a neurosis. This man is *fey*.

And it is as manifestations of incipient insanity, in a man of his culture and breeding, that we may fitly regard those *canalleries* which shocked his best friends, the vulgar abuse of Adam Smith, the still more offensive aspersions on Mill in respect of his sane and wise inculcation of birth control—aspersions which, like the fling at the dying regrets of Buckle, make us feel how odious a man of genius may be. And inasmuch as the prophet cannot be taught save by another prophet to whom he may chance to humble himself, the spectacle of Ruskin's delirations may perchance be a monition to those who may hereafter don the prophetic mantle, suggesting to them that after all there may have been a reason why prophets from time to time get stoned—the reason, namely, that they "began it."

But let that not be our valediction. If we will read thoughtfully enough, we may learn from the worst-inspired

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* i, 183-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* ii, 33-4.

of prophetic pronouncements even as from the best, solving the contrast in the vision of a human drama in which they are not dominators but sufferers, less revealers than revelations. The larger vision will not indeed leave us rapturously prostrate before genius which is bound up with feverish arrogance and angry error. But it will make us compassionate where genius itself was opprobrious; inasmuch as we can see in the very gift of genius something often entailing tragical penalties. Where the psychopath stormed and railed, we, seeing in his miscarriage part of the human penalty, reckon it as an aspect of the vast waste of Nature, humanly considered. And we shall not be led by any of his disillusionments to speak of man, with him, as "a lacertine breed of bitterness, leaving on the leaf a glittering slime, and in the sand a useless furrow." Rather we shall echo, over his memory, his truer elegy on "the sorrow and the labour and the passing away of men."

# MATTHEW ARNOLD

## I

ARNOLD is so far in better case than the rival prophets of his day that the first thought called up by his name is not that of loss of halo, or occultation of authority. Whatever may be his latter-day status as a humanist, in our broad sense of a critic of life, or as a prophet in competition with Carlyle and the rest, he quite unquestionably retains a secure place in English literature as a poet. Though never so widely popular as his chief corrivals in modern English poetry, and though chiefly valued even now for only a portion of his work, he has incurred, I think, no such reaction as has assailed alike Tennyson and Browning. Never widely over-rated, he is in little danger of being under-rated, as both Browning and Tennyson have been at the hands of some critics, and some coteries, who fail to distinguish between poetic teaching, poetic art, and poetic inspiration. Even as a critic he is so far from being dismissed that one able modern who formerly assailed him, Mr. T. S. Eliot, has latterly paid him new tribute; and only the other day he was newly acclaimed in respect of just that one of his literary formulas which might have been most confidently regarded as obsolete—his description of poetry as “criticism of life.”

That, surely, is a surprising stroke of championship, challenging critical remonstrance. Arnold, as a matter of fact, had come latterly to recognize that his definition had little value, and said as much. To begin with, as he reminds us in his essay on Byron, he had originally said that all literature is criticism of life; which is rather an attempt at an abstraction than either a description or a definition, and is hardly a happy abstraction. Neither Homer nor the Vedas, neither Genesis nor the *Æneid*, neither the *Mort D'Arthur* nor the *Faerie Queene*, neither lyric in general nor tale or

drama in general, come naturally under the conception put, which in effect makes representation of life the same thing as criticism of it, and treats sheer lyrical self-expression on the same footing. But when, standing by his abstraction, Arnold in his reiterative way laboured to insist that still poetry *is* criticism of life, he was undermining it. "We are not," he confesses, "brought much on our way, I admit, towards an adequate definition of poetry as distinguished from prose by that truth." Obviously, we are not brought any way at all. "Still," he goes on, "a truth it is, and poetry can never prosper if it is forgotten." And some writers on *belles lettres* are still, it would seem, ready to bear him out.

One critic having pronounced the proposition a truism, another maintains it as a truth, against the attack of Mr. Lascelles Abercromby, who, it is contended, has really committed himself to a conception of poetry which squares with Arnold's. If so, perhaps Mr. Abercromby will in turn incur animadversion. For the description of poetry as "at bottom" criticism of life, one must repeat, is either a mere verbalism, used in that quite vague and inadequate sense in which all literature may be termed criticism of life, or is, as we contend, a false definition of poetry as distinct from other forms of literature. The dispute obviously turns on the word "criticism." Arnold has in a score of places propounded his notion of criticism as a process of comparative judgment, an effort to see the thing as it really is, a conclusion sought for in the light of a knowledge of the best that has been thought and said. But here are his words on poetry in 1880, a year before the partial surrender :—

In poetry, as a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty, the spirit of our race will find, we have said, as time goes on and as other helps fail, its consolation and stay. But the consolation and stay will be of power in proportion to the power of the criticism of life. And the criticism of life will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than inferior, sound rather than unsound, true rather than untrue or half-true.

And the consolation and stay, he surprisingly explains, will be the more indispensable because the stays of religion and

philosophy will in the long run be found to be vain—a “criticism of life” which must have caused some perturbation among his well-wishers in the communion of the Church of England.

## II

It is really worth while, on purely literary grounds, to sift this pronouncement, by way of coming to an appraisal of Arnold's capacity as a thinker. On that head he was sometimes modest, as when he smilingly declared that “philosophy has always been getting me into trouble”; but he was confident enough in his general attitude as a proponent of truth to his fellows; and there is a very visible conviction of having seen to the bottom of his problem here, as in his predication in general. In effect, he is telling us what Emerson claimed for himself: “If I don't know what poetry is, I don't know anything.”<sup>1</sup> Yet the procedure in this case is but a confident asseveration of an ill-considered definition, and as such is an impeachment of his thinking faculty. Not content with bringing poetry under the category of criticism, he insists on claiming for it a utilitarian status. Its main or final function, in his eyes, is to “stay and console.”

In a sense, doubtless, every human occupation or effort that is not confessedly a folly may be said to have a utilitarian status, inasmuch as it would not be carried on unless we felt it did us good. But that very fact makes the utilitarian status æsthetically non-significant for poetry in particular. Fiction has the same status, and this for a far larger number of persons. Sermons have often been alleged to stay and console, and do one good. Political speeches, even leading articles, are frequently declared to do the same thing. Golf is confidently alleged to do it. Gardening is a means of durable delight to myriads. Drama and music, fine acting and fine singing, effect the same utilitarian ministry. And, as to the formula of criticism of life, not only fiction in general but didactic literature in general, the whole literature

<sup>1</sup> *William Allingham: A Diary*, 1907, p. 242.



of the essay, of moral aspiration, of express reflection on life and character, and on the ground problems of religion, is obviously far better entitled to the description (that being broadly its aim and purpose) than is poetry. In poetry the didactic impulse, as Arnold at times could not help seeing, and as Browning once protested,<sup>1</sup> in unconscious impeachment of much of his own practice, always tends to ensnare the poet in the trammels of the spirit of prose. It is in its nature but little amenable to "the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty."

When, then, Arnold is expressly praised for defining poetry as criticism of life, we are moved to ask the panegyrist, What do you suppose a definition to be? Is not its purpose to give precision to a term which in ordinary use tends to lack precision? But in Arnold's formula the main term is divested of precision to a far greater extent than happens in its ordinary use. That is predicated as the essential mark of poetry which is far more truly the mark of many other things; and we are invited to think of one theoretic mark or aspect of poetry as the defining one, when in point of fact the really delimiting marks of poetry are quite different. Wordsworth indeed, chiming with Coleridge, argued very suggestively that the true antithesis is not between poetry and prose but between poetry and science: the latter being matter of exact knowledge as such; the former, matter of emotional reflection on any knowledge, whereas prose is but the norm of speech and is often turned to emotional purpose. But already we are classing poetry under the same head with much prose; and it is clear that Arnold meant to distinguish between poetry and prose. Yet, as he finally almost admits, he fails.

Is he, then, to be vindicated by the plea that, even if he has failed to produce a sound definition, he has nevertheless laid his finger on a necessary qualification of good and enduring poetry—the qualification that, in order to be enduring, it must have the power to stay and console, and

<sup>1</sup> In the lines on "Transcendentalism: A Poem in Twelve Books."

that the power to stay and console is in terms of the power of its criticism of life? We answer that that defence will not avail either. Again the reasoning process breaks down. On the one hand, the power to stay and console inheres equally in great music and great prose; on the other hand, there is much admirable and much delightful poetry that is not rationally to be described as criticism of life, and much that cannot be said to stay and console save by the ministry of sheer æsthetic beauty, as do music, and pictures, and noble architecture, and fine art work in any kind. When we read in *MACBETH* :

To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow,  
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
 To the last syllable of recorded time;  
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,  
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
 And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
 Signifying nothing—

we are certainly listening to great poetry, and to memorable criticism of life; but are we stayed and consoled, otherwise than by the subtle ministration of rhythm and diction, phrase and image and sad harmonious reverie? We are clean outside the terms of Arnold's definition. This poetry lives not as sound criticism of life, but as the magnificent utterance of a mood which, Arnold himself would tell us, cannot yield a criticism of life that shall be true for men in general, though it may haunt them with its reverberating challenge to their own content in their existence. Neither Arnold nor anybody else would deny the status of great poetry to the cry of *Iras* in *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA* :

Finish, good lady: the bright day is done,  
 And we are for the dark!

or to the cry of *Antony* :

Unarm, Eros, the long day's work is done,  
 And we must sleep;

though the immediate purpose is the explicit negation of stay

and comfort—unless we are to say that we are stayed and consoled by being prepared to face death. But if that be the argument, we go further. Shall we deny the title of poetry to Arnold's own poem of DOVER BEACH? Thus it ends:—

Ah, love, let us be true  
 To one another! for the world, which seems  
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
 So various, so beautiful, so new,  
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
 And we are here as on a darkling plain  
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Stay and consolation, quotha! If this be it, what theological pessimist ever missed it? And is *this* the criticism of life that Arnold propounded for his generation or posterity? Hardly: and still we read DOVER BEACH, and find a grave joy in its cadences; and prefer it to RUGBY CHAPEL and the EPILOGUE TO LESSING'S LAOCOON, with their conscientious didacticism. If we can use our minds to true purpose, we are theoretically utilitarian in our ethics, but not in our æsthetics.

It might indeed be argued that, on the view here put, the ultimate appraisalment is still utilitarian, in the sense that we grade our æsthetic preferences in terms of the "amount" of pleasure we derive from the different orders of impression. It is agreed that all art cognized as good is joy-giving; and our present thesis is that the joy given is for each the test or measure of æsthetic merit. This reminds us that the whole ethical problem has for ages been confused by the dispute over the word "pleasure," which, connoting in practice both "spiritual" and "bodily" satisfactions so-called, serves as the target of those who recoil from admitting that the criterion of right and wrong is open to any revision or reform by calculation of results. Is that dispute, then, reopened by the attempt to create a standard for the appreciation of poetry?

I think not. It is a matter of indifference to the rationalist utilitarian, as such, whether or not degree or mode of pleasure is made the criterion of æsthetic value, though he may feel tolerably certain that one of those tests supervenes.

But he will not lend himself to the attempt to establish a *quantitative* measure for either a moral or an æsthetic sensation. In the words of the old illustration of Bentham, "push-pin" may set up in one person a great volume of satisfaction where poetry creates none, or even sets up *dissatisfaction*; and the "how much" of my joy in a rhythm is not for me to be measured against the satisfaction given by a thought or a figure seen to be just or "happy." These are incommensurables; and the issue raised by Arnold does not involve them. What he has done is to confuse two orders of satisfaction by treating a didactic as if it were an æsthetic phenomenon. It is not that he declares "stay and consolation" to be a higher or larger service than ministry to the sense of poetic beauty: it is that he declares the former to be *the* service by which the value of poetry is to be measured in criticism. And here he has demonstrably collapsed in one of his main critical undertakings.

Clearly the failure is not cured by the incidental effort, in the essay on "The Study of Poetry," to guard against the valuing of poetry as a prophylactic, instanced by those who discourse of "Hymns which have helped me." Some such lucubrations probably moved Arnold to put a warning against "the fallacy caused by an estimate which we may call personal." That is but a counter-dictum to the test of "stay and consolation"; inasmuch as that is precisely a personal test; and the vague attempt in the same essay to reach an objective test ends in a mere citation of examples, with a confession of inability to get further in theory. The dependence on the didactic, the utilitarian, the hygienic test, remains unrelieved.

It is really a singular thing that men ostensibly dedicated both by gifts and by culture to the æsthetic life should thus alternately treat morals æsthetically and æsthetics ethically, denaturalizing and perverting both. If we seek an explanation, it is hardly to be found save in the verdict that, strictly speaking, they do not competently *think*. Arnold's misconceiving pronouncements on poetry are here on a par with Mr. Bernard Shaw's protest that Shakespeare has "No MESSAGE"

for modern mankind, inasmuch as he yields no Tract for the Fabian Society.

Men who deliver themselves of verdicts of that kind are wont to disparage the mental life of half their fellow creatures by the disdainful application of the term *bourgeois*, which they savour very much as the pious used to do "infidel." Well, there are a million bourgeois in Britain who are qualified to snap their fingers at their contemners, and to tell them : "You are a tribe of half-trained pedants, whose ethic is, in Nietzsche's phrase, one of moralic acid, and whose æsthetic is a bungling effort to identify art with the gospel of Mutual Improvement. We poor devils who toil at desk and counter can tell you that you know neither your own job nor ours ; that life is a larger thing than you make it out to be ; and that art in general and poetry in particular are more subtle and complex than you represent them. You would fain preach at the piano and be lyrical in the legislator's chair. We at least know that when Browning sang

O to be in England  
Now that April's there !

he was uttering poetry—deny it if you dare—and he was *not* criticizing life : he was expressing life, he was singing life. And as for the publicist who denounces Shakespeare for not turning his plays into pamphlets and leaving a Message for the Masses, he is but bewraying himself. To make out his prosaic impeachment, naturally as it might be supposed to come to a mind without perception of poetry as such, he has to renounce his primary function of humorist."

### III

Here, too, the nullity of the doctrine comes of inadequate thinking ; and that again is the conclusion forced on us when we weigh the page in which Arnold gravely offers reasons why "we must set our standard for poetry high," as if that needed to be proved for poetry any more than for anything else. It is a distressing promenade of fallacy. Sainte-Beuve, he tells us,

"relates that Napoleon one day said, when somebody was spoken of in

his presence as a charlatan : 'Charlatan as much as you please ; but where is there not charlatanism ?'—'Yes,' answers Sainte-Beuve, 'in politics, in the art of governing mankind, that is perhaps true. But in the order of thought, in art, the glory, the eternal honour is that charlatanism shall find no entrance ; herein lies the inviolableness of that noble portion of men's being.' It is admirably said," Arnold goes on ; "and let us hold fast to it. In poetry, which is thought and art in one, it is the glory, the eternal honour, that charlatanism *shall* find no entrance ; that this noble sphere be kept inviolate and inviolable. Charlatanism is for confusing and obliterating the distinctions between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue and only half-true. It is charlatanism, conscious or unconscious, whenever we confuse or obliterate them. And in poetry, *more* than anywhere else, it is unpermissible to confuse or obliterate them. *For*"—observe the *because*—"in poetry the distinction between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound, true and untrue or only half-true, is of paramount importance."

As if it were not at least equally of paramount importance in everything else—nay, as if it were not of greater importance in politics, which affects the whole frame of life, and in criticism, which seeks truth, whereas poetry seeks beauty. Arnold's "*shall* not" and "*more* than" is a virtual surrender of Sainte-Beuve's implicit pretence that charlatanism in the nature of things *cannot* enter unto art. And his own thesis is naught. Is it true or untrue or only half-true that the world

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light ?

And is that categorically false assertion, then, charlatanism ? By the poet's own definition it is. Taking charlatanism to mean what Arnold says it does, is it not again of paramount importance that it be branded for what it is in the life of politics ? And is it pretended that Napoleon is confuted when it is actually confessed that criticism must *strive* to keep charlatanism *out of* art and poetry, which is in effect a confession that it is always tending to enter there ? Sainte-Beuve and Arnold alike have set up the merest verbal confusion. What Napoleon said was, in effect, that charlatanism enters or tends to enter into every field of human effort. They answer him, formally, that it does not enter into poetry and art ; when, as Arnold's pleading goes on to show, they merely mean that it does not enter into the *best* art and poetry ; whereas it is equally true that it does not

enter into the best of anything else. If it be argued that where charlatanism enters, poetry disappears, the argument again cancels itself. In that case, why trouble, as Arnold is here doing, to keep it out? If there is no bad poetry, because poetry cannot be bad, all that demand for goodness and truth in poetry is self-stultification. Poetry, by the definition last supposed, cannot be untrue or unsound.

It is all a puerile verbal entanglement. Napoleon was talking common sense; the eminent critics uncommon nonsense. Charlatanism, the false, the unsound, tends to enter into every field of utterance and action, and is fitly to be met in each by critical exposure. That is one of the ends for which criticism functions. Napoleon played the charlatan often enough. There was assuredly charlatanism on his side at Waterloo; and the result was according. But was there on his side any charlatanism at Wagram and Marengo and Jena, when Austria and Prussia were smitten as with the hammer of Thor? It certainly pervades politics; but there is a good and a bad, a sound and an unsound, in politics as in poetry; and it is assuredly of supreme importance that we should *there* distinguish between the true and the false, since to fail to do so may mean national ruin or disaster; whereas the obtrusion of charlatanism of thought or diction into the poetry, say, of Victor Hugo, would be merely a question of the gratification of bad as against good taste. If the idle plea that poetry is immune from infection be withdrawn, Arnold's argument is finally a blind alley. Poetry, he assures us, must in particular be kept sound, because on its soundness depends its power to sustain and console us. But, in the terms of the case, the *unsound* poetry sustains and consoles many people, else it would have no acceptance whatever. And he must be a very unobservant student of life and man who has not seen poor poetry, poetry technically inferior, whether true or untrue, giving stay and consolation to many. The vogue of the bulk of hymnology, by Arnold's express admission, gives the proof.

But by Arnold's definition the finer poetry itself is not exempt from charlatanism. Wordsworth's quatrain :

One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good,  
Than all the sages can,

is certainly not true. Does any one believe it? Did Wordsworth? By Arnold's definition it is charlatanism. But the definition, strictly taken, is a fanaticism; and considerate criticism cannot so use such a term where an artist asserts what we know to be untrue but asserts it winningly. Wordsworth's proposition is poetic fallacy, like the burden of *DOVER BEACH* and the despairing cry of Macbeth, who speaks dramatically in character. The æsthetic test is the measure of charm and relative fitness in the utterance; poetry, as such, admits of no other. In the words of Watson:—

Song is not truth, not wisdom, but the rose  
Upon truth's lips, the light in wisdom's eyes.

If, indeed, the poet, posing as teacher, insists that in his poetry he is telling us the sheer truth, as Browning seems to insist when he is theologizing, as Tennyson not seldom seems to insist, we are bound to try his alleged truth on its merits; though even then we call him at worst fallacy-monger rather than charlatan. If ever that term is fitly to be employed in the criticism of poetry, it is in application to cheap and bad technique, or sheer claptrap, or venal platitude, not to errors in thinking, or the presentment of a mood as a permanent belief. While we feel that sheer veridical thought, which is hard enough to attain in prose, is not the poets' main function, we recognize how natural is their yearning to teach; but we must remind them that the singing robe gives them no authority or exemption here. With Wordsworth, too often, the verdict must be that the teaching is neither true nor poetical, but just fallacy in bad verse, neither truth nor poetry. And yet Arnold, with a wide measure of assent, claimed for Wordsworth that he yielded more of stay and consolation than any other poet. The answer must be that if people felt they had it, they had it. But they had it, some of them, alike from the sound and the unsound thinking—nay, often from the bad verse.



And here Arnold, as critic, is to be finally tested. For criticism there are no æsthetic exemptions. *Its* function is veridical or nothing; for the mere autobiographic process of saying, however charmingly, I adore this, I detest that, is not properly to be termed criticism; and Arnold never pretended that it was. He recognized, implicitly if not explicitly, that criticism is a search for consistency in judgment, a giving of adequate reasons, to which it can always stand. It is a challenging and a sifting of judgments, a campaign against incoherence in taste and appreciation. And when the critic gives us unsound theory, bad reasoning, like all that about charlatanism which *cannot* enter into poetry and *therefore* must be *kept* out of it, and about poetry being as such criticism of life, he is already in a measure impeached. Had any one in his day chosen to play Matthew with Arnold, he might have treated us to an edifying procedure, putting Arnold and Sainte-Beuve at the bar and asking them: "Do you think it is conducive to the honour and glory of letters to give us charlatan logic about charlatanism, confusing the proposition, some *y is x*, with *x is y*; and meeting the proposition, some *x is in a, b, c, d*, and the rest, with the claim: *x is not in some of d*, as if that were a rebuttal? Does it not occur to you that keen spirits, seeking for truth, may say, These men are themselves charlatans, even if they be counted practitioners of the Higher Charlatanism; then let us leave them their field of literary expatiation, and let us turn away to the heights of science, where charlatanism dies in the purer air, where the false can never long cajole, and where our souls run the minimum risk of deterioration?"

## IV

But let us be less Draconic, contenting ourselves with trying the critic by his results in his special field. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch has expressly claimed for him that what he did, and what previous critics, including Coleridge, missed doing,

was to treat Criticism as a deliberate disinterested art, with laws

and methods of its own, a proper temper, and certain standards or touchstones of right taste by which the quality of any writing, as literature, could be tested. In other words, he introduced authority, and, with authority, responsibility, into a business which had hitherto been practised at the best by brilliant nonconformists and at the worst by Quarterly Reviewers—who, taking for their motto *Judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur*, either forgot or never surmised that to punish the guilty can be but a corollary of a higher obligation to discover the truth.<sup>1</sup>

And Sir Arthur, who thus adventurously outgoes Arnold's theorem that poetry is criticism of life with the theorem that sound criticism is art, seems to think that Arnold's *ESSAYS IN CRITICISM* helped his countrymen to detect pervading untruth in Macaulay's presentment of William III and in Carlyle's picture of the French Revolution. This is not exactly reassuring. Sound criticism was passed on Carlyle's *FRENCH REVOLUTION* long before Arnold produced his *ESSAYS IN CRITICISM*; and Arnold's strictures on Macaulay are far from making out anything against his portraiture of William, which is less a literary than a historical problem. Nay, Arnold's frequent attacks on Macaulay are visibly expressions of personal dislike rather than critical judgments. They are malicious; and malice and criticism are of two houses. Further, there had been good criticism as well as bad in the quarterlies, though it had mostly passed out of notice. Arnold himself loyally recognized, what so few of his panegyrists remember, that Hallam, before him, was both a judicious and a judicial critic. And if there really are in Arnold specifications of laws and methods by which the quality of any writing as literature can be tested, it would be a service to cite them. Some of us, looking there for such laws and methods, have never been able to find them. For ourselves, we are fain to suggest that law and method in criticism are to be reached only or mainly by proceeding from grounds of agreement to grounds of further agreement, where dispute is to be resolved by applying the tests of consistency. Did Arnold, then, achieve this?

<sup>1</sup> Introd. to Oxford ed. of Arnold's Poems (1913), pp. vii-viii.

Let us put the next test: is he consistent with himself even in his concrete judgments? They are not very numerous: it was only in his closing years that he set himself to pass expatiative judgments on a number of English classics; but even in this small body of criticism he is self-contradictory enough to startle admirers. His two verdicts on Byron are well known. In the early essay on "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" Byron is pronounced "empty of matter"; which by the Arnoldian canons is a defect fatal to excellence in poetry: at the end Byron is paired with Wordsworth for the chief poetic honours of the century. It is interesting to remember that Emerson, in talk in 1873, was "inclined to regard Byron as the chief poet of the century, and to give him place before Wordsworth," to the surprise of Norton.<sup>1</sup> But Emerson offered no reasons, as was his habit; whereas Arnold committed himself to one, to his own undoing.

"When the year 1900 is turned," Arnold deliberately writes, "and our nation comes to recount her poetic glories in the century which has just been ended, the first names with her will be these, Wordsworth and Byron." The explicit self-contradiction is bad enough; but what shall be said of the judgment which sets Byron above both Tennyson and Browning? Swinburne, who previously had acclaimed Byron, revolted at this estimate all the more excitedly because Arnold, saying nothing of his own old verdict that Byron was empty of matter, had seized with avidity on Swinburne's old panegyric of Byron's "splendid and imperishable excellence of sincerity and strength." In Arnold's essay, that phrase does practically the whole business of eulogium, as was his way in criticism. Faced by a complex problem, he blandly launches a bevy of graceful and sonorous formulas, and goes on ringing their changes, till the one oftenest used is claimed to have settled the question.

In this case, obviously, it cannot settle it. Has not Browning the splendid and imperishable excellence of sincerity

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of C. E. Norton*, i, 508. One wonders whether Emerson's opinion reached and influenced Arnold.

and strength? Sincerity and strength on other lines than Byron's, doubtless, but assuredly not of lower psychological and ethical grades. Swinburne and Arnold should have added, for their panegyrical purposes, the item of courage, in which, as Arnold incidentally notes, Byron has few compeers. But these are not the data that determine an æsthetic issue such as the status of Byron in English poetry; and it is one of Arnold's prime critical mishaps to have failed to put in this connection the true critical tests. Poetry is ultimately to be appraised by the essentially æsthetic tests; not by tests which are equally applicable to didactic literature in general. The decisive difference between Byron's gifts and those of Tennyson and Browning is that in him, for the most part, we are charmed by the fine arts of rhetoric, of which he is a master; in them, in large part, by the finer spirit of poetic inspiration, the rarer faculty which attains a triumph of form and tone through or with sheer intension of feeling.

This is fitly to be called the greater because it is the rarer endowment, is more certainly unattainable by literary exercise, is a deeper penetration of our psychic life, and yields a profounder æsthetic and artistic experience. Many men of letters could have trained themselves to write vigorous tales in verse like *LARA* and *THE GIAOUR* and *MAZEPPA*, which are applications of the method of Scott to more moving and passionate themes. Fewer, certainly, were the men who could have compassed the wit and the criticism of life in *BEPPA* and *DON JUAN*, where the success is so largely non-poetic. But none at all could by taking thought have produced tolerable imitations of *MAUD* and *THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS*. And in the year 1900 cultured English readers in general had realized this, and quashed Arnold's verdict. Byron is a great writer, if you will: even Swinburne, after his dervish-dance over Byron's blank-verse and Byron's character, admits that; but to call him one of the two greatest English poets of the nineteenth century is to practise a criticism which can claim no authority, and which flouts responsibility, being an instance of what Arnold himself called the eternal enemy of literary excellence, caprice. The

rebuttal of the late essay on Byron is largely embodied in the Preface of 1853.

Thus Arnold, uncritically reversing his first estimate of Byron, uncritical with a difference, laid himself open to the most destructive fire from Swinburne, reversing *his* early acclamation; and the poet-critics between them leave us largely convinced that poets have changeable palates, but not critical systems. Arnold's device of setting earnest work of Byron's against dilettantist work of Shelley, saying nothing of Shelley's earnest work or Byron's trifling or his fustian, is one of his common critical sins, on which Swinburne easily retaliates. And while Swinburne's superlatives on Shelley are no better justified than Arnold's placing of Byron above him, Arnold's criticism of Shelley also is far from judicial,<sup>1</sup> and overlooks as many of Shelley's merits as Swinburne ignored of his artistic weaknesses. Swinburne's dogmatic exaltation of Shelley's Ode to the West Wind over Keats's Ode to a Nightingale is of a piece with Arnold's attempt to deny to Shelley any higher praise than that he was the poet of clouds and sunsets. Science in criticism may or may not be worth striving after: on any view, we do not get it from either of the partisan poets. Swinburne, one can see, adored in Shelley what he himself possessed—boundless fluency as distinct from pregnancy. Arnold gave credit for qualities such as *he* possessed—practical hold on life, and concern for the concrete in thought. We get no further than that.

## V

And if we are to weigh completely the question of Arnold's competence as a theoretic critic, we have to note yet another issue on which his logic miscarries. Dealing, in the early essay on *The Function of Criticism*, with Wordsworth's pronouncement that "the critical power" is "infinitely lower

<sup>1</sup> Lord Chief Justice Coleridge, in his brief preface to the posthumously collected *Second Series of Essays in Criticism*, mentions that Arnold "is known to have intended to write something more" on Shelley; "not indeed to alter or qualify what he said, but to say something else which he thought also true, and which needed saying."

than the inventive" and that the time consumed in writing critiques would be much better employed in "original composition of whatever kind it might be," he makes the halting comment (after dealing with Wordsworth's supererogatory fling at "false or malicious criticism") that "The critical power *is* of lower rank than the creative. *True.....But.....* men may have the *sense of exercising* this free creative activity *.....even in criticizing.*" The claim is wrongly conceded, then denied; and then it is conceded again. Here we have one more failure to grasp aright a simple logical and psychological issue. To assume, or to concede, that all poetry is as such "creative" and that criticism is as such non-creative, and therefore less important, is but to fall into one more verbal confusion. Unless the claim be that an invented theme or tale, in poetry, is as such "creation," and that *that* is a higher function than criticism, the claim is pure fallacy.

If any ideation is fitly to be singled out as "creative," it is that which effectively innovates, and criticism may do that as truly as poetry. It was Arnold's obvious business, in terms of his own thesis about "criticism of life," to reply that the two forms of ideation are alike "creative" exactly, and only, insofar as they contribute new ideas, conceptions, matter, vision, to the pre-existing stock. It is obvious that bad poetry can have no more merit than criticism of the same grade of badness: the common-sense verdict would be that on the poet's own showing it is rather worse, as being a lapse from what the poet reckons a higher function, and what the critic often implicitly treats as such, by giving to his own high task as little earnest heed as may be.

Wordsworth's proposition, it should be remembered, was not put by him in a published paper, but in a conversation of which there is a trustworthy report, and which has been made widely current by Arnold's citation of it. As it has every mark of being a sincere utterance, however, the poet must be held to account for it. The critical verdict must perforce be that in making such an assertion Wordsworth had lapsed, probably under stress of temper over some criticism of his own work, into sheer mental dishonesty,

since he had himself declared, in a published essay,<sup>1</sup> that the great mass of "invention" in his own day was utterly worthless, denouncing the "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse" ministering to a "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation," which would seem to be a worse kind of harm than that wrought by bad criticism.

In that essay Wordsworth himself strenuously plays the critic, to better purpose, be it said, than he was at times to play the poet later; and by penning that indictment he has taken it for granted that the act of judgment is incomparably more important than the bad invention. It is significant of the heedlessness with which he was followed by his worshippers that the two internecine pronouncements should have been assimilated without any sign of misgiving. Obviously, his original statement was the true one. The mass of literary "invention" has for considerate criticism no merit worth dwelling on. And the fact that the mass of written criticism is either little or nothing better is no more an indictment of criticism, as such, than is the other charge an indictment of poetry or fiction, of "creation" or "invention," as such. The mere process of narrative invention, further, is visibly one of the most facile, and can be accorded superior literary importance only in the degree of its felicity and originality. In short, poetry is to be esteemed above criticism not as being more "creative"—still less as being alone creative—but solely as being, where it is at or near its best, the rarer and more delight-giving thing. Arnold has betrayed his function in professing to vindicate it.

## VI

And yet Arnold is not done with as a critic. If he yields no critical science to the student seeking it, he gives plenty of good concrete guidance, while his self-contradictions give their own warning. Even when he commits himself, on the

<sup>1</sup> Preface to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*.

strength of the second scene in *MACBETH*, to the verdict that Shakespeare is not even eminently an artist, he unwittingly forces us to realize the dangers of text-worship, inasmuch as he helps to force the student to see, what he himself could not, that the second scene in *MACBETH* is not from Shakespeare's hand. The influence of the Preface of 1853, which seems to have been wide among his cultured readers, must have at least told usefully against the formless fluency of the "Spasmodic" and other schools of the middle Victorian period, though his later niggardness in appreciation of Tennyson perhaps told against his own authority. He found Tennyson lacking in intellectual faculty; but that judgment raises the question of the status of his own faculty of thought, which, though perhaps clearer than Tennyson's, is not exactly profound; and it again confuses the æsthetic issue, especially when he takes to laurelling Byron. Nevertheless, he was an intellectual force in his age, and he must largely remain so for ours.

From the first he assumes the air of authority, the prophetic pose; and in this he competes notably with his corrivals. Shunning alike the Sibylline and the Hebraic postures and gestures of Carlyle; seeking alternately the effects of classic dignity and those of delicate mockery; employing in general the didactic manner and the reiterative style of his father lecturing with academic calm to the Rugby boys; dealing with religious issues in a temper little cultivated in England in his day; extolling sweet reasonableness as the most important of Christian ideals, he acquired, over a wide area, a high distinction as an example of the virtue he extolled.

No less a reputation, indeed, could have carried him over the episode of his attack on Colenso, the most flagrantly unreasonable onslaught made by any publicist in his time, coming as it did from one who knew that Colenso was speaking the 'simple truth. His gravamen was that the Bishop, as a man of religion, had no business to deal in matter of science, archæological or critical; and this he argued while praising Strauss, by way of further belittling



Colenso. It is all on the plane of Carlyle's belittlement of Strauss, a fling of temper, an unseemly explosion of foolish irritation. To the last, Arnold persisted in his perverse denunciation, till he finally forced alike the religious and the irreligious to ask whether the devoted Churchman who called the doctrine of the Trinity a fairy-tale of three Lord Shaftesburys had any title to condemn a Bishop who earnestly and ably sought to disburden his creed of plain historical falsity.

That episode reveals in him at once the element of critical caprice and the element of overweening, the pontifical temper, apparently hereditary, which he brought to bear on all subjects, and infused into so many formulas. Often it elicited mockery; at times it stirred indignation, as when, in a tone compounded of those of Cato and Mrs. Partington, he prescribed wholesale flogging and capital punishment for all concerned in the breaking down of the Hyde Park railings. Men asked: What do Sweetness and Light mean, in the mouth which thus predicates? With that outbreak of rank unwisdom may be bracketed his celebrated prophecy that, if Prussia were so infatuated as to go to war with France, the Prussian troops would be swept away before a charge of Zouaves. That awful prophetic mishap, perhaps, had a sobering influence on him; the Arnold of the 'seventies and 'eighties is in the main more chastened, though he never ceased to comport himself as one speaking with authority, and not as other scribes.

The effect was seen after his death, when his friend, Lord Chief Justice Coleridge, alluding to certain criticisms which had been passed on Arnold's teaching, disposed of them by announcing that the framers of those criticisms "had no authority." As if the Lord Chief Justice had authority, in literary matters, to decide what or who had authority; and as if any critical question could be disposed of by such a vacuous pronouncement. The Lord Chief Justice, in fact, had begun by deriding his friend's first literary work, but afterwards, we are told, bitterly repented.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Russell, *Matthew Arnold* (1904), p. 101.

He would seem to have held that all other critics were bound to follow his example. Having neither his motives nor his malleability, they did not. But the air of authority, steadily maintained, and joined with a literary gift, carries its point with many; and when it is reinforced, as in Arnold's case, with a gift of humour which counters humorous retaliation in its own key, it widens its hold. Carlyle might jeer,<sup>1</sup> but Arnold carried weight.

## VII

And the fit summing-up of his performance as a humanist—as, in his own phrase, a critic of life—is that he carried to the side of reason and reasonableness a large body of educated opinion, all the larger because, as one put it, he could be regarded as teaching that Atheism is the religion of the Church of England. Intellectually, it is an entertaining spectacle. In one of his early moods of intellectualism, he had emphatically denounced the English habit of cherishing anomalies. In the end we find him not only denying the divinity of Jesus and insisting, with Renan, that miracles do not happen, but profanely deriding the doctrine of the Trinity and explaining that no real meaning can be attached to the name God save “Something not Ourselves which makes for Righteousness.” And all the while he goes habitually to church, regularly takes the Holy Sacrament, turns to the East at the traditional or psychological moment, hymns the Church of England as the most reasonable of Establishments, and pleads unwearyingly for the literary use of the Bible in the school and the home. One of his scholastic freaks was to urge that Latin could usefully be introduced and maintained in the elementary schools by the use of the Vulgate, which would be so much easier than the classics, and yet could pave the way for them. This was apparently an idea of his father's,<sup>2</sup> who not unjustly maintained that the Vulgate is not “dog

<sup>1</sup> “Poor Matthew Arnold! He thinks that if *he* were to die, God Almighty could never make *another* Matthew Arnold” (D. Wilson, *Mr. Froude and Carlyle*, 1898, p. 293). Pontiffs, like Jehovahs, are jealous of their competitors.

<sup>2</sup> G. W. E. Russell, *Matthew Arnold*, p. 101.

Latin" but "*lion* Latin," as he well might, seeing that it is the plain model of all the English versions. When this champion of tradition declared that miracles do not happen, and that a personal God is a chimera, churchmen and churchwomen listened who had shut their ears to all rationalist propaganda so called.

He had won his audience by becoming more of an anomaly-monger than themselves, more English than the English by his own definition. "You love anomalies," he might finally have said; "I give you an all-embracing anomaly." He was himself, so to speak, an anomaly incarnate. And he achieved this adjustment because throughout he kept with him something of the intellectual atmosphere of the vicarage; looking at science and philosophy and all new ideas with the bland or bored distaste of the old world college-man of books and culture. In his youth he had at times broken loose, developing startling enthusiasms for Rachel and for George Sand (to say nothing of that episode of Marguerite, on which Shelley, had he been alive and vindictive, might have commented with some pun-gency); and Spinoza set him on the path of detachment from faith. But he was always more at home in church than in the hall of science, where he could and would learn nothing. Hence the frequent liminary fussiness of his attitude on popular politics and social movement, his humorous but unappeasable vexation over Marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister—which, as some observed, he seemed to regard as a compulsory measure, and his traditionism over Divorce. The first was so "indelicate"; the second so dangerous. These things bulked very large on his sky-line, as on that of the vicarage: save for his creditable liberalism on the Irish question, he had little philosophic breadth of political outlook, and was a good deal of an imperialist. Here we have him handling morals æsthetically, after handling æsthetics ethically in the fashion we have seen. The "Hebrew passion for righteousness" evaporates from him precisely where and when it is most needed. But indeed he cheerfully though inadequately confessed to having affinities for the class which

he christened the Barbarians ; though he was apparently unaware of his kinship with the Philistines, especially after Swinburne had dubbed him David the son of Goliath.

It is hard to say what he finally believed in his heart of hearts. Always standing up for the religious attitude and the religious machinery, he tells his educated readers that there is nothing behind. "Our religion, parading evidences such as those on which the popular mind relies now ; our philosophy, pluming itself on its reasonings about causation and finite and infinite being : what are they but the shadows and dreams and false shows of knowledge ? The day will come when we shall wonder at ourselves for having trusted to them, for having taken them seriously ; and the more we perceive their hollowness, the more we shall prize 'the breath and finer spirit of knowledge' offered to us by poetry."<sup>1</sup> This in an introduction to a collection of English poetry for the general reader. It is a sufficiently complete negation of the religion of the Church of England, the most reasonable of Establishments. Is the creed of poetry, then, what the commission agents call "a firm offer" ? Is a disillusioned world, divesting itself of religion as an outworn robe and despairing of a philosophy, to find an adequate substitute in *one* of the fine arts ?

The cultivators of the rest will cheerfully answer that "There are others"; and the men of science, belike, will smile as superiorly as Arnold ever did at the capacity of talkers for paying themselves with words. But, coming from him, the message is really as fitting as may be. For it is as poet that he himself has his securest hold on us. The really fine and fascinating anomaly in Arnold is that he, who in his prose is always oracularly proclaiming certitudes, always delivering the law and the prophets from the altitude of his self-confidence, is at the same time the chosen poet of diffidence, of doubt—nay, of despondency. And, triumphantly confuting and at the same time transcending his own æsthetic utilitarianism, he distils compensation from the

<sup>1</sup> *Essays in Criticism*, 2nd Series, p. 3.

confession of failure, since sorrow that is transmuted into song has ceased to be pain.

Machiavelli, in one of his letters, has a moving page in which he tells how, when broken in fortune and cast down in hope, carrying in his nerves the memory of his torture at the hands of authority, passing his days in a trivial routine, he yet by night, in his upper chamber of study, clothed in fresh and comely garments, communes with the great ancients in their scrolls, and, putting away his cares, his poverty, and all his dark vistas, for a space of hours is free from low trouble and all the burden of things. Arnold, in his very different intellectual world, has also his upper chamber; something above even the plane of the study; a plane where he breathes another air than that of his daily tasks and his didactic functions; where from preacher and publicist he is transmuted to singer, voicing a sense of nothingness in all the matter of his predication, yet from the very avowal evoking the victorious actuality of song. For he is our greatest master of Elegy. What Gray was for his age, Arnold is for the larger world of ours, with its vaster horizons, its deeper problems, its expanded experience. From his youth an instinct led him to the elegiac singers and prosists of his own time, of whom he was to be the best remembered.

When so many fames of the past have dwindled, and so many current estimates of past and present writers violently conflict, it is interesting to note how many judgments coincide in "placing" Arnold for his poetry. Swinburne, in 1867,

*retained* the opinion that, if justly judged, he must be judged by his verse and not by his prose, certainly not by this alone; that future students would cleave to that with more of care and of love; that the most memorable quality about him was the quality of a poet.<sup>1</sup>

At a later date, lecturing on Arnold, Leslie Stephen, a very different spirit from Swinburne, pronounced that "Whatever else he was, Arnold was a genuine poet." And, later still, Mr. Birrell, so different from both, pronounces that Stephen "holds the true faith about Arnold."<sup>2</sup> That was said twenty years ago; and to-day, to all appearance, opinion runs pretty

<sup>1</sup> *Essays and Studies*, 4th ed., p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> *More Obiter Dicta* (1924), p. 6.

unanimously the same way. Lord Morley told the poet that when setting out on a railway journey he always put a volume of his in his pocket ; and often, if not always, the volume must have been of verse. And when we remember that Arnold was of all modern poets, as has been said, the most deliberate in his assumption of the singing robes, the least ostensibly dedicated to lyrism, the most balanced by the spirit of "prose and reason," the outcome is at once instructive to the critic and the psychologist, and encouraging to all who may have been led to fear that poetry may have no future.

Re-reading him as we so surely do, taxing his prophetic claims, non-suiting him on so many of his doctrines, we never tire of the best of his poetry. Swinburne, through all his critical revolt, pays unstinted homage to that. And for that, the rest is easily to be forgiven, where forgiveness is needed—which, after all, is but in portions of a memorable prose output that counted for much in enlightening darkness, in softening harshness, in conquering perversity.

Even were it not so, if to those who have loved much, much is to be forgiven, much is to be forgiven to him who has finely sung. Over his harvest of song, even though like some larger stores it may need winnowing, we can forgive him for not naming his compeers, Tennyson and Browning, as the men to be laurelled at the century's end. Whatsoever may be the residual following of Wordsworth, it is not Byron that we place in the front rank of our poets, either in 1900 or in 1925 ; but in that rank, with the others whom we need not in this connection further name, is Arnold's self. He did not attain for us, as he thought, the critical science of song, the sure knowledge of the elements of its value. But valuing none the less goes on ; and he gave us the something to value—Song itself. And that, by Wordsworth's later account at least, is something better.

It is in its way a fortuitous gain to us, as in another way are the works of so many writers, thinkers, historians, who were never paid for their toil. In Arnold's case the special fortuity lies in the divergence of his practice from his precept. Neither in his thinking nor in his artistry is he consistent.

"The Strayed Reveller" was as much an infraction of his own poetic canons as "The New Sirens," which on that score he withdrew, ultimately to reproduce it on the urging of Swinburne, the least Arnoldian of the moderns. The "Reveller" remains a faulty experiment, after greater German models, in a new blank verse; yet it holds its place because it has inspiration. Wordsworth was his chosen Master; but his own spirit, and still more his practice, is un-Wordsworthian; and the violent sonnet "To an Independent Preacher" is an unthinking diatribe against Wordsworth's central principle, angrily delivered just because the preacher was a Nonconformist. The invective is hopelessly confused and self-destructive; and still it has readers.

In his execution he is curiously unequal. In "A Modern Sappho" (1849) the third line of the fourth stanza is a prosodic outrage; and in the lines "To my Friends who ridiculed a Tender Leave-Taking," published in the same year, we have:

Marguerite says: "As last year went,  
So the coming year'll be spent,"

though the next lines are not at all colloquial, and the grave refrain is:

Ere the parting hour go by,  
Quick thy tablets, Memory!

An intelligent schoolboy would have shunned that "year'll," as he would have felt the burlesque quality of "straw hats bedeck'd their heads." But Arnold's lapses never affected the pontifical certitude with which he laid down the law for others in prose and verse, or the docile reception of it by many cultured persons.

An ugly Anglo-Saxon name, in the phrase "Wragg is in custody," gave him a text for a culture sermon; but mean names have free course in "The Scholar Gipsy" and in "Thyrsis," where we read that

In the two Hinkseys nothing is the same,

and are moved to add:

Except, of course, the despicable name;

remembering his own confession of the glamour of Celtic place-names, and the magical effect of those in Milton. More serious flaws are never far to seek in his chequered output. And still the cadences, and the emotions they carry, twine with memory and feeling, and we enshrine him as the poet of reverie, the master of the minor key. The two last stanzas of "The Scholar Gipsy" are utterly irrelevant to the poem ; yet no man wishes them away. In Arnold's art, as in his teaching, we grow inured to anomaly, till we feel that the "Gipsy" and "Thyrsis" are of the line of "Lycidas," and see the Inspector of Schools, the worldling of some men's estimate, when all is said, eluding our blame as he takes wing,

Still clutching the inviolable shade

—though even there "clutching" is surely not the right word !

It is a judgment, indeed, which goes far to set aside some of his own, notably that on Shelley as the "ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain." The critic supposed himself to be achieving, in his criticism, something solid and enduring, something "effectual" because of commending itself to the spirit of prose and reason. His achievement turns out to be mainly of another kind. Not a little of his hortatory and critical thinking proves to be "in vain," with a difference ; in his case as in the other it is the uncalculated, the unmoral and unpractical play of the spirit of song, seeking its own ends, proffering neither counsel nor consolation, that outlasts the touch of time. "Which things are an allegory," that he himself has put into nearly perfect verse in his poem of "Human Life," winning triumph out of self-confutation. Nay, it might even be claimed that here he has really wrought poetry out of "criticism of life," without so planning it ! Time, and time only, will show whether any of his corvial prophets has won out better, for posterity.



## JOHN STUART MILL

### I

To turn to Stuart Mill after revisiting Carlyle and Emerson and Ruskin and Arnold is to undergo a quite definite, and a not unwelcome, change of intellectual climate. We have ostensibly left the region of the prophets and entered that of the thinkers. From the method of dogmatism and the airs of the sibyl and the pontiff we have come to the method of argument, of the rendering and receiving of reasons. Of Mill as a thinker the general account is that, following with a difference the leads of his father and of Bentham, he seeks to bring the spirit of science and the logic of science to bear on the social problems which the prophets were handling with their innate conviction that neither the matter nor the method of science had anything that could enlighten them, approaching all problems as they did with intuitive knowledge of right and wrong. Here, we feel, is the promise of a new wisdom, of a saner intellectual world.

And that Mill in his own way guided and swayed men to such an advance is at least as certain as anything that can be claimed for the influence of any of the prophets. The men who have valued him and praised him were, and are, as a rule, of a different mental cast from the *clientèle* of the intuitionists; they were themselves economists, thinkers, students, rationalists, rather than emotionalists or "hot gospellers" of any form of intuitive zeal. As such, happily, they count for us no less than the panegyrists of any of the faiths of authority. And, if less rapturous, they are no less humanly cordial in their recognition of what Mill did for them. Bain, the cool analyst, rises to a grave fervour of commemoration in his often-quoted sentence at the close of his unimpassioned monograph: "No calculus can integrate

the innumerable little pulses of knowledge and of thought that he has made to vibrate in the minds of his generation."

And this is no retrospective delusion such as may come to a friendly critic seeking a peroration. At Mill's death, in 1873, there was a chorus of testimony which tells of a wide, living influence, not to be outweighed by any of that time. Beside the records of Ruskin's influence for good on the young men of Oxford and the Working Men's College stand those of the impact of Mill's spirit on the youth of the same period.

"When I was an undergraduate," wrote Henry Fawcett, "I well remember that most of my friends who were likely to take high mathematical honours were already so intimately acquainted with Mr. Mill's writings, and were so much imbued with their spirit, that they might have been regarded as his disciples. Many looked up to him as their teacher; many have since felt that he then instilled into them principles which, to a great extent, have guided their conduct in after life. Any one who is intimately acquainted with Mr. Mill's writings will readily understand how it is that they possess such peculiar attractiveness for the class of readers to whom I am now referring. There is nothing more characteristic in his writings than generosity and courage. He always states his opponents' case with the most judicial impartiality; he never shrinks from the expression of opinion because he thinks it unpopular; and there is nothing so abhorrent to him as that bigotry which prevents a man from appreciating what is just and true in the views of those who differ from him."

Lord Morley, then a young man, was no less warm in his tribute to the thinker who had influenced him more than any other. The then young Frederic Harrison, with express reference to Mill's decisive breach with Comtism on the score of its hieratic machinery, declared for his co-religionists that, in face of that criticism,

we dwell on the memory of Mr. Mill with admiration and sympathy. We reverence that unfaltering fearlessness of spirit, that warmth of generous emotion, that guileless simplicity of nature which made his life heroic. Neither insult, failure, nor abandonment could shake his sense of duty, or touch his gentle and serene fortitude. For us his high example, his noble philosophic calm, continue to live and teach. He being dead yet speaketh.....The work of his spirit is not ended, nor the task of his life accomplished; but we feel that his nature is entering on a new and greater life among us—one that is entirely spiritual, intellectual, and moral.

And Lord Morley, writing in 1906, declared that the centenary of his birth found Mill's good fame unshaken and unshakeable. "His life was true to his professions, and was no less tolerant, liberal, unselfish, single-minded, high, and strenuous than they were."

Perhaps a weightier testimony than any of these, inasmuch as it came from a student who had strongly reacted against and ably criticized Mill's exposition of Utilitarianism, is the tribute passed by Judge Shaw of Belfast in a paper read, with reference to the Mill Centenary, in 1907. Telling of "the impression which Mill had made on the minds of the generation who were growing to manhood in the early sixties of last century," with a special regard to Northern Ireland, he reports that

"There were not many of us, I think, who adopted in their totality Mill's views—metaphysical, political, social, or religious; but no divergences of opinion, even on the most important subjects, could prevent us from looking back with reverence to the great teacher who had been the inspirer and the guide of our first efforts at independent thinking." "If one were asked to say what was the first great lesson which the student learnt from Mill, I think the answer would be that it was the idea of scientific method—of the nature of scientific evidence and the conditions of scientific proof." "I regard .....faith in human progress, and in the possibility of raising man's life and man's character to a far higher level than they have ever yet attained, as one of the greatest and most inspiring lessons that Mill had to teach." "Mill's 'Essay on Liberty' is worthy to stand beside Milton's 'Areopagitica' and Jeremy Taylor's 'Liberty of Prophesying' as a plea for liberty and as a landmark in the history of free-thought."<sup>1</sup>

These are the testimonies of one successively a professor of metaphysics and ethics and of political economy, and a judge, always ostensibly a convinced theist, and admittedly one of the best as well as one of the ablest men in the Ireland of his day.

No mere "logic machine," then, no purveyor of "sawdustish" science to the Gradgrinds of his day, was John Mill for the best hearts and heads of his generation. While the

<sup>1</sup> *Occasional Papers*, by J. J. Shaw (Dublin; 1910), pp. 286, 289, 301, 305.

disillusioned Carlyle, flattered by the new discipleship of Ruskin, was jeering at the creed of "McCulloch, Mill, and Company" as dismal and desperate, saner men were being made by it fit for a better life than that of the despairing prophets. "It does not profess," wrote Fox Bourne (then editor of the *Examiner*) of the collection of tributes to Mill which he edited, "to give a full portrait, or even a rough sketch, of Mr. Mill, nor to be in any way a work of art. It is only a broken utterance of our honour for the worthiest man of our time, and a public acknowledgment of the debt that we, in common with all the world, owe to him." None of the prophets, surely, was better praised. Precisely on the score of high feeling, nobility of character, true humanism, Mill was in his way a more lifting revelation to a multitude of the best men of his time than were those oracles of intuition some of whom were wont to speak of him, publicly or privately, as the type of all that was soulless in doctrine and desolating in social practice. The testimonies, weighed, are conclusive.

And in addition we have the testimony of Carlyle, in this respect noteworthy and decisive, as to Mill's gift for reaching the general mind of his generation. In the midst of a monologue in which the prophet was much concerned to disparage Mill's habit of "approaching everything by the way of logical analysis," whereas the prophet intuitively knew that "there were quite other qualities in it, not at all to be detected by logical analysis," he nevertheless avowed that "Mill had one faculty in great perfection: he possessed the power of setting forth his opinions with a lucidity which no one in England could match. What he aimed to make you see, you saw as plainly as a conspicuous object set in the sunshine."<sup>1</sup> There were, in fact, other ways of making people listen than the vaticinatory, and Mill had found a public who really preferred, in these matters, sunshine to thunderstorm. To no other rival of his younger days did Carlyle accord such a testimonial.

<sup>1</sup> Gavan Duffy, *Conversations with Carlyle*, p. 166.

## II

And yet, here as in the other cases, Time casts a chastening verdict. The bearer of the newer light, the oracle of the new spirit, like the others, incurs revaluation, devaluation, a writing-off of some supposed assets, a lowering of supposed altitude. Nothing, indeed, can write out that influence which he exercised on his age. The late Henry Sidgwick, a good witness on such a point, testified that "no one thinker, so far as I know, has ever had anything like equal influence in the forty years or so that have elapsed since Mill's dominion began to weaken." And two years before Mill's death Fawcett had written that "Anyone who has resided during the last twenty years at either of our Universities must have noticed that Mr. Mill is the author who has most powerfully influenced nearly all the young men of the greatest promise." It is well to remind ourselves, from time to time, that we can make the past neither better nor worse by our opinion of it. All that immensity of life has actually been lived, and remains as much part of the total reality of things as the mountains and the fossils and yesterday's politics. No belittling verdict affects the vanished infinity of life; and only one thing makes it more rational to criticize the past than to criticize the sea—the fact, namely, that we can so learn from it as to make better the future.

And that is our final business, as true humanists, with the past in any of its aspects: to know it as truly as we can, neither white-washing, or pink-washing, the Middle Ages, or any other ages, with Carlyle and Ruskin, nor filming them and lime-lighting them sentimentally or cynically, or denaturalizing or satirizing or caricaturing them with our popular dramatists; but soberly trying to realize them as they were, for our instruction and guidance. Our objective must be, not to assure ourselves that we are superior to the Early Victorians, or that Joan of Arc was superior to her age and to us, but just to know how things really went, and what people really were like. For when we discover that they made mistakes and missed the truth where they thought they had

found it, our first rational reflection must be that posterity is very likely, nay, very sure, to make the same discoveries about us.

Mill's intellectual credit, we say, has gone down for us even as has that of the prophets of his time. He has been of late years little discussed, in comparison with the others. There is indeed no adequate Life of him : only the Autobiography, a few critical monographs, and the Letters, keep his personality before the world. The other day, on the death of our most distinguished philosopher, F. H. Bradley, the *Times* announced, as members of its staff do from time to time, that he gave its death-blow to Mill's Logic. The statement is not that of a student of logic : it is simply the transmission of "what they say" at the universities, where Mill's Logic was once the recognized text-book, and is so no longer. The melodramatic pronouncement gives small idea of what has really happened. As a matter of fact, the alleged death-blow was given over forty years ago ; and only in the last year or two do we hear of it in the press. So long does it take for new philosophic thought to be widely assimilated, or even widely heard of. What Bradley did was not to sweep away Mill's System of Logic. What he did show was that Mill's Canons of Induction will not bear analysis, inasmuch as they misread and misstate the psychological process of belief from evidence, whether scientific or ordinary, and that in the process the argument falls into incoherence. The criticism is at once a logical and a psychological one ; but, inasmuch as psychological assumptions are made by Mill as by other logicians, the refutation is thus doubly valid.

What logic asks, broadly speaking, is in regard to any and every proposition, What justifies us in believing it, and *how* is the justification to be gone about ? Those questions cannot be thoroughly answered without scrutinizing our psychological processes ; and while Mill often usefully did that, warning us against many loose assumptions, he did not completely realize the problem ; and in missing the psychological truth he fell into concrete logical fallacy. Latterly, logic has become much more of a psychological inquiry than

it was in his hands or those of his predecessors. But let us beware of supposing that the inquiry has been now carried to finality. It has not been carried to perfect lucidity by either Bosanquet or Bradley. Bradley's razor was certainly a finer and stronger blade than Mill's; his vision more swiftly piercing than Bosanquet's. But it will go hard if the next generation is not supplied with a treatise free from the touches of unphilosophic arrogance which Bradley could never long forgo, and cleared of the confusion between the two aspects, the logical and the psychological, from which Bosanquet never, I think, successfully emerged.

In point of fact, Mill's *Logic* was abundantly subjected to criticism throughout his life. He himself was at his best in criticism, in detecting other men's deficiencies: his fresh constructive work was much less sure. His dictum,<sup>1</sup> that there is a Logic of Consistency which is different from the Logic of Truth, is really a disastrous commitment, obtruding a failure to realize that the ultimate concept of Truth is just a concept of complete consistency. There cannot be *two* logics. William Minto, I think, was before Bradley in indicating a whole series of scientific flaws of detail in Mill's "System" in his article on Mill in the ninth edition of the *ENCYCLOPÆDIA BRITANNICA* (1878); and on Mill's treatment of induction in particular, which is the central issue, he expressly pronounced that "the greater portion of the substance of what he treats of under the name of induction, and especially the so-called experimental methods, have nothing whatever to do with the establishment of general propositions, in the technical sense of general propositions." That is nearly the gist of Bradley's criticism. And Bradley's own summing-up was that "Even if we confined ourselves to Mr. Mill's *Logic* we should find that, when his so-called Four Inductive Methods were wholly removed, and his inference from mere particulars banished as a misunderstanding, the more valuable and even the larger part of his discussions on Science would remain untouched."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *System of Logic*, bk. ii, ch. iii, § 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Principles of Logic*, N.Y. ed. 1912, bk. i, pt. ii, ch. iii, § 16, *end*.

That being so, Mill's Logic sufficed as an educational instrument in many respects long after the so-called death-blow.

Still, let us not blink the fact that not only in his logic but in his economics his work contained elements scientifically unsound. Minto, a searching and original thinker, summed up that what was special to Mill was not an attempt, as some put it, to teach men of science how to go to work, but to endeavour to show that propositions of cause and effect in human affairs must be proved, if they admit of proof at all, absolute or approximate, on the same principles with propositions of cause and effect in the material world. But to say that is to force us to remember that Mill expressly directs his *System of Logic* finally, in the fashion indicated by Minto, to the outlining or establishment of an *Ethology*, a science of National Characters, which, by the unreserved admission of Bain, comes to nothing. All that part of his work is at best a suggestive discussion of certain aspects of Sociology, yielding no scientific result. His own discontinuance of the inquiry tells of his sense of its failure. It was in fact an expedition on wrong lines, on fallacious assumptions. The *Logic*, such as it is, would be better presented without it, though it would be perhaps a less popularly attractive book.

The unsound elements in the *Political Economy* are perhaps more seriously unsound than those in the *Logic*. For the "Four Fundamental Propositions concerning Capital"—curiously matching his Four Inductive Methods—there obtruded as of central importance, are hopelessly self-contradictory and unsubstantial. It was J. H. Levy, a disciple and warm admirer of Mill as man and teacher, who pronounced that the *Political Economy* was "a ruin"; this while recognizing that the progressive campaign of Stanley Jevons against Mill on all fronts was an outcome of obsession, ending in uncritical animus. It would be tedious to go into the details. Suffice it that not merely determined opponents, but admiring disciples, found Mill's economics, as a scientific whole, in vital parts untenable, though full of



suggestion. Indeed, his surrender of the Wage Fund doctrine in itself amounted to a retreat.

And it is to be feared that Cairnes's eulogy of Mill as an economist, printed by Bain as an appendix to his monograph, is over-kind to Mill and less than just to others. He actually represents that Ricardo contemplated a perpetual minimum wage representing a bare subsistence for the worker ; whereas in truth Ricardo, after having sketched a strictly abstract and technical theorem of wages as part of a general outline of economic principles (written solely on the urging of James Mill), declared in so many words, in his second edition, that " the friends of humanity cannot but wish that in all countries the labouring classes should have a taste for comforts and enjoyments, and that they should be stimulated by all legal means in their exertions to procure them. There cannot be a better security against a superabundant population " <sup>1</sup>—the factor which above all tended to keep wages at a minimum. And, as Ricardo expressly points out, Major Torrens before him had clearly set forth the variability of the standard of comfort in different times and countries.

Here, surely, we should learn to be on our guard against that perverse criticism of parts of the past which so constantly extols a favoured teacher at the expense of all his contemporaries and predecessors. We have seen Lecky thus extolling Carlyle. Cairnes, besides doing that injustice to Ricardo out of sympathy for Mill, further extolled Mill as being practically the first to point out that the " laws " of political economy, as explicated by Ricardo and his school, are not moral laws or prescriptions of conduct but statements of causal sequence in commercial processes. Really, Ricardo never thought otherwise, whatever may have been the misconceptions of some of his followers. That very praise, unfairly given to Mill at the expense of Ricardo, has been just as unfairly given to Ruskin at the expense of Mill. If we are really to be more humanely philosophic than our predecessors, we must seek to be more just than that,

<sup>1</sup> *Principles of Political Economy*, 2nd ed., 1819, p. 95.

more vigilant in our research, more circumspect in our thinking.

As against Ruskin's latterly more and more virulent aspersions of Mill as a humanist, we can see that Mill actually slackened the scientific texture of his teaching in his anxiety to preach a progressive gospel where Ricardo, one of the most actively benevolent of men, was content to seek scientific truth on the tranquil assumption that other benevolent men's instincts could not induce them to pass malevolent criticism on a procedure carried-on in entire scientific good faith. Their demonstration to the contrary is but one more reminder that one form of emotional prompting is no security for the attainment of either truth or righteousness. Mill himself was to some extent party to that injustice, but we do him poor honour by committing it in his name.

### III

Focussing our surveys, we can attain to an estimate of him that is at once sympathetic and critically just. In respect of his rectitude, his candour, his humanity, his courage, he was one of the truest of humanists. He had all Ruskin's and Carlyle's concern for better life without their constant proclivity to passionate injustice, from which he was saved by a better training; a partly innate and partly acquired sense of the intellectual dangers of intuitionism; and a spirit of sympathy which did not merely operate, as in Ruskin, to produce a winning courtesy in private intercourse, but in controversy controlled him to fairness, which Ruskin's temperament never did. Part of Mill's training, indeed, consisted in seeing how strong convictions, even with a fixed habit of rationalizing, could make even powerful minds like his father's and Bentham's impercipient of other points of view, to the extent, at times, of reasoning illogically. That he was of a less strong fibre than his father has often been remarked—perhaps with a touch of the tendency to identify strength with asperity; but his more delicate susceptibility, while it did actually mean less stability and less

original intellectual force, was not a mere element of weakness. It is the old story of the defects of qualities: the qualities are not cancelled by the defects. John Mill's mental constitution, we must repeat, included delicacies of sympathy and perception which were lacking in James Mill and in Bentham, both of whom were his spiritual fathers.

And this was both a strength and a weakness. It was a strength in that it made impossible for him such a surrender to unphilosophic passion as yielded James Mill's furious "Fragment on Mackintosh"; it made him more finely fingered than Bentham for many purposes. On the other hand, it made him excessively responsive to some of the emotional influences which came to bear upon him under an intellectual guise. In his youthful reaction towards poetry and towards the half-disguised intuitionism of Coleridge—influences which simply never affected his father and Bentham at all—he lost for a time his own critical balance, and became positively and blunderingly unjust (though never malignantly so, in the manner of the prophets) in his attitude to Bentham. This can be shown in the strictest logical detail.<sup>1</sup> Afterwards, defending Bentham against the injustice of others, he confuted and answered himself, and rendered Bentham justice; and in the Autobiography he testifies to his "splendid services."

Here, then, in John Mill, we have the flaw of instability with the gift of susceptibility; and at some times of his life steady-going political and personal friends like the Grotes had an unhappy feeling that he was not to be depended on. It is customary to lay the blame, in these matters, on the influence of Mrs. Taylor, who ultimately became his wife, and whom he adored and praised in a fashion that constitutes one of the most remarkable episodes in literary biography. But while nobody has ever been able to share Mill's extraordinary estimate of her mental powers, it is very doubtful, I think, whether that remarkable woman was the anti-intellectual influence that some suppose. What we possess

<sup>1</sup> I have partly developed the subject in *A Short History of Morals* (1920), pp. 371 sq., 387 sq.

of her writing exhibits a rather strikingly rationalistic mind—one, indeed, which deserves more careful biographical attention than it has received. A little of the study and sympathy lavished on Jane Carlyle might have yielded interesting and enlightening results concerning Mrs. Taylor.<sup>1</sup>

My own final inference is that the unstable element in Mill, the tendency to waver in judgment and in scientific procedure under emotional pressures, was there independently of Mrs. Taylor, even as were his gifts, though her attraction brought into special prominence his special susceptibility. And the complete statement of the case, I think, would be that Mill, specially trained and largely gifted to play the part of a new rational force, was not so gifted in the fullest degree, and owed much of his actual superiority to his methodical training by his father.

To say this, indeed, is not to confute or reject the judgment that the singularly strict educational discipline which he underwent from his early childhood did something to overstrain his cerebral structure. Bain, who took that view, was the sincere admirer of both father and son, and was a scientific educationist, with a good right to an opinion. And his view is well founded, though we must be on our guard against a common misconception as to Mill's education, framed without due regard to his own testimony. The question is one of the danger of early strain. Infant prodigies are notoriously likely to fail to develop greatly in adolescence, the reason being, the physiologists tell us, that brains exceptionally active in childhood are prematurely hardened. It is probably true that Mill's most original and efficient work in economics was put into his early "Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy." But already, probably, some harm had been done to the instrument. That much of Mill's incessant study in boyhood, with its instantaneous transitions from one field to another,

<sup>1</sup> There has actually emerged what seems to be an absolute myth concerning Mrs. Taylor's share in the matter of the destruction of the MS. of vol. i of Carlyle's *French Revolution* when it was in Mill's hands. There is really not a grain of evidence for the suggestion that she was guiltily responsible. All the evidence is flatly the other way.

was unfruitful, is proved not only by Bain's reasoning but by some of Mill's own admissions. It often meant a weak seizure of the subject matter. At all times, apparently, he had to read books repeatedly to grasp their purport. In this respect he contrasts remarkably with Spencer. The whole of Bain's criticism on this head is soundly scientific. The fact was, as he notes in his *Life of James Mill*, that that very able man approached the subject of Education mainly on *à priori* lines, with no check or guidance from experience.<sup>1</sup>

There seems to be a final balance of considerations in support of Mr. Hugh Elliot's estimate that Mill's recognized superiority as a publicist in his generation was largely due, as he himself said, to the fact that he got a start of some twenty-five years over his contemporaries in respect of the breadth of the education given and arranged for him, however miscalculatingly in some respects, by his father, as compared with any training then obtainable at the English universities.

For we must remember that Mill's education consisted not merely in the learning of languages and sciences, history and mathematics, though much is said of these in the *Autobiography* and in Bain's monograph. It was largely a matter of hearing all the problems of social science handled in a scientific fashion, and hearing every kind of loose reasoning acutely dissected. Next to Bentham, James Mill was the chief publicist of his time on all such matters, doing a hundred years ago what has been done in our own time by many

<sup>1</sup> The worst of his errors as a tutor is revealed in a letter of Francis Place, from Ford Abbey, where Place and the Mill family were staying with Bentham. Not only were the Mill children at times "scolded or cuffed over their lessons," but for small failures in their work they were at times punished by the deprivation of a meal (Graham Wallas's *Life of Francis Place*, ed. 1908, pp. 73-4). Had Bain known of this he would have censured it severely as thoroughly bad management. For James Mill as an educator we can but say, with Place, that his method was "infinitely precise"; that if he overworked his children he was always overworking himself; and that he really supplied a remarkable training. And as against any general condemnation of his methods we have the express declaration of his son (*Autobiography*, p. 53): "I do not believe that fear, as an element in education, can be dispensed with"; and, again (p. 52), the testimony that his father's rule "was not such as to prevent me from having a happy childhood."

earnest people with a high sense of pioneering virtue.<sup>1</sup> From his father, John Mill had an encyclopædic training as a reformer. And the emotional quickness which not only primed many of his practical judgments but lent him unearned conviction in too many of his logical processes was perhaps, after all, really the passionate element in his father, turned into channels of sympathy instead of channels of prejudice.

In any case, it is to be remembered that, with all his drill in Greek and Latin and science and mathematics, he had from his father a very fair amount of early impulse to the reading of poetry. James Mill, though he cared little for Shakespeare, greatly admired Milton, and set some store by Spenser, whereas his boy found little pleasure in that poet. But the father went out of his way to borrow for the boy the *Arabian Nights* and *Don Quixote* and more modern works of fiction; and John of his own accord took positive "delight" in Scott's metrical romances, in Pope's *Homer*, in Anson's *Voyages*, and in various solid histories. Nay, he composed airs for some of the songs in Scott, which he used to "sing internally"; and, like any other "human boy" of literary proclivity, he wrote tragedies, being thereto moved by the works of—Joanna Baillie! In short, to conceive of the young Mill as having been "put into a kind of moral and logical strait-waistcoat and kept there till it had become a part of himself"<sup>2</sup> is to put a misleading view. Well drilled

<sup>1</sup> James Mill seems to have been the first to formulate the principle of taxation of Unearned Increment (Bain, *James Mill*, p. 411). He was, in fact, one of the most widely influential publicists of his time, and may be said to have created a public in advance for his son, who had not the same faculty of personally impressing disciples, apart from his books. The virtual oblivion into which his name and fame passed is feelingly remarked on by his son in his *Diary of 1854* (*Letters*, ii, 358). It was a matter of lack of literary charm. John Mill, though not a great writer, made the necessary impact in virtue of his larger emotional range; though at his death the *Times* pronounced his style "vastly unreadable." The large class which cannot read is always thus convinced that many authors cannot write.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen, *Hours in a Library*, ed. 1892, iii, 259 (essay on Autobiography). The fact that Mill goes on in his Autobiography (p. 112) to speak of the Benthamite group in general as "undervaluing poetry" seems to have been regarded as a complaint that he had been starved on that side. But he expressly declares: "the truth was that many of us were great readers of poetry," and that the correct charge against himself and his father would be

as he was, he had otherwise a normal experience. And he revealed normal tendencies.

Just as in his economics he was unduly conservative of erroneous doctrines which he found apparently established by his teachers; so in his attitude to religion he was really much swayed by traditional sentiment, though his father had given him a soundly agnostic training, and saved him alike from the evangelicalism which made the young Ruskin a passionate obscurantist, and the Calvinism which left Carlyle always obsessed by the vision of an angry God, wroth with the creatures he had made. In Mill's case the emotional bias yielded a much more humane attitude. And still he never reached an adequately scientific philosophy. His admiration for the Gospel Jesus, so warmly expressed in his letters to Carlyle in the early 'thirties, was not the utterance of a critical student. As Bain observes, he never in maturity studied either theology or ecclesiastical history; and he made no research whatever on Christian origins. His judgment here was thus a mere emotional reaction, proceeding largely on just the kind of presuppositions against which he warned his readers in the *Logic*. It formed no part of his own working mental life. As Bain sums up, "the fact remains that in everything characteristic of the creed of Christendom he was a thoroughgoing negationist. He admitted neither its truth nor its utility."<sup>1</sup> His uncritical attitude to Christian origins is in fact an instance of his special anxiety to do full justice to "the other side," a form of bias not common before or after him.

But still more serious was his failure to handle scientifically the problem of Theism. Curiously antipathetic to the method of Spencer, who, with whatever laxities of logic in detail, early reached the vital perception that the causation of the Infinite Universe must remain unknowable to man, Mill

that they were "*theoretically* indifferent to it"—as an educational instrument, that is. When he further tells how "in the most sectarian period of [his] Benthamism" the reading of Pope's *Essay on Man* acted very powerfully on his "imagination," we begin to realize that what he tells of the tonic effect of Wordsworth upon him is a rather misleading magnification of one of a series of experiences into a special case.

<sup>1</sup> *J. S. Mill*, p. 140.

left us in his posthumous *Essays on Religion* a theistic theorem which can never have satisfied a philosophic mind. Guided as much by his strong moral sympathies as by his logical recognition of the hopeless inconsistencies of Theism in all its traditional forms, he firmly rejected, as did his father, the impossible formula of a Benevolent Omnipotence which foreplans all evil and yet hates evil. But instead of accepting Spencer's reminder that the inferred Power "behind the Universe" (a crude phrase, in itself anthropomorphic) is not rationally to be regarded in terms of Mind but inferred as necessarily transcending Mind, he fell into that form of the Sympathetic Fallacy which tentatively pictures a God animated by the best intentions but unable to control the Universe to his will.

For this naïve notion of a Limited Liability God there is simply nothing to be said. Its presentment by the late Professor William James is a prodigy of self-confutation; and its handling by Mr. Wells lacks even the ingenuity which marks some of the other's dialectic.<sup>1</sup> It solves no problem whatever. Those who seek a theistic solution are merely left asking for a God above the Limited God. If we seek a God-Idea to explain the Universe, and are offered that of a God who is largely the victim of circumstances, the answer must just be that instead of a God we are offered the conception of a well-meaning Angel, to whom the Universe as a whole must be as much of a puzzle as it is to us, and who must seek for a God-Idea on his own account to explain it. To what end is this futile conception offered to us by a lover of reason? The answer must just be that Mill, sympathetically concerned over all the problems that faced his fellow creatures, ethically as well as logically debarred from acquiescing in the immoral Theism which makes the Theos Good, yet at once the Author and Punisher of Evil, sought to frame for anxious enquirers a conception which did not clash with the moral sense, not pausing to realize how hopelessly it clashed with logic. For his own part, he was an Agnostic,

<sup>1</sup> In his latest "novel," *The World of William Clissold*, Mr. Wells appears to abandon that and all other forms of theism.



finding no emotional support in his own theorem.<sup>1</sup> Yet he framed that theorem quite seriously for others. The result is merely critical damage to his reputation as a thinker.

To say this is to say that the thinker did not think enough ; that his thinking faculty was overborne by another side of him. That that was a generous and sympathetic side does not alter the statement of his intellectual shortcoming. And a hardly less destructive criticism must, I think, be passed on his handling of ethical philosophy in his short and ill-studied treatise on Utilitarianism. Those whom Mill influenced alike by his devotion to reason and by the nobility of his character are apt to be loth to admit that where he took the right side on a philosophic issue he ever handled it incompetently. But it really cannot be successfully disputed that, just as he reasoned confusedly and fallaciously on certain central issues in logic and economics, he at times reasoned confusedly on ethics, thus doing a real disservice to the cause he had at heart by enabling its opponents to triumph over his halting and self-contradictory statement of his case.

He has thus furnished the Philistines with several weapons. His gratuitous injustice to Bentham, in a period of temperamental reaction, has supplied them with more disparagements than they could have invented, and has thus contributed lamentably to the maintaining of a quite false estimate of a man whose influence for social betterment, by the sheer cultivation of the spirit of reason in legislation, can be proved by irrefutable testimony to have been on the whole greater than that of any man of his age. Mill's unjust judgments are still quoted against Bentham by writers who iniquitously ignore his later countervailing testimonies. Such are some of the moral evils wrought by want of thought on the part of thinkers.

If this be reckoned a hard saying, let the objectors remember and acknowledge how hard were the unjust sayings of Mill, in his time of reaction, against Bentham. He at least could not have complained that posterity should tax him

<sup>1</sup> In his book on Comte (2nd ed., p. 32) he indicates no notion that the God-Idea carries any but injurious implications for the thinker.

with injustice where he was really unjust, and with bad reasoning where he really reasoned badly, after he had attacked Bentham, not for his real errors, but for not doing what he never pretended to do—nay, for not doing what would have been wholly irrelevant to his purpose. And it is no good excuse for Mill to say that, in a time of nervous depression, he was naturally repelled by aspects of Bentham's teaching which he found were repelling Carlyle and other intuitionists with whom he was then sympathetic. For it was Bentham who, in a scientific treatise, called on the legislator "to give new force to the sentiment of benevolence." It was Bentham who wrote that "A time will come when humanity will spread its mantle over everything that breathes." It was Bentham who, first of modern jurists, took up Milton's demand for an extension of freedom of divorce. And, as Mill himself in his later and better mood avowed, it was Bentham who in 1780, by his demand for a legal protection of animals, made a "noble anticipation of the better morality of which a first dawn has been seen in laws enacted nearly fifty years afterwards." Why, one asks, could he not have remembered that when he was disparaging Bentham in his youth? For he knew the ground well, having actually edited, with much care, and with not a little necessary interpolation by himself, Bentham's "Rationale of Judicial Evidence," which, as he says, "is one of the richest in matter of all Bentham's productions." And he has left on record, in the Autobiography,<sup>1</sup> that the reading, at the age of sixteen, of Dumont's exposition of Bentham's doctrine on Legislation "was an epoch in my life; one of the turning points in my mental history.....When I laid down the last volume of the *Traité*, I had become a different being."

## IV

Thus questioning, we may seem to have veered considerably from the attitude of recognizing in Mill an

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 64-6

exceptional lover and a magnanimous exponent of justice. But our notion of him is to be unified by a consideration which, indeed, ought to be taken into account in all our estimates of the teachings of humanists as such—the consideration, namely, of the physiological determinants of their thought and feeling. We know from Professor Bain that in 1836 Mill, who had previously suffered from long attacks of depression and despondency, underwent a special health disturbance, which Bain twice particularizes as an affection of the brain,<sup>1</sup> leaving him long and deeply depressed. It was in this period of serious physical and psychical perturbation, before and after his father's death, that Mill developed the reactionary views about his early teachers which, in his full maturity, he in effect recanted. And, whether or not we regard that particular prostration as a result of the severe over-training of his brain in his childhood and boyhood, which it probably was, it is a fact that must be faced.

In his *Autobiography*, significantly enough, he says nothing whatever of the illness of 1836, though it actually left on him the external mark of facial twitching which thenceforth never left him. Of a previous severe depression in 1826, evidently, as Bain insists, a product of brain over-strain also, he tells us how joyless and hopeless he became while it lasted. But of the more prolonged collapse of 1836 he gives no account. Saying nothing of the fact that in the period over which the trouble actively extended he wrote that essay on Bentham which in later life he virtually recanted, he tells of the work which in that period he was doing on his *Logic*. And here it is revealed that that very portion of his work<sup>2</sup> in the *Logic* on which he is technically open to the most destructive criticism (apart from the practical miscarriage of his sociological theory) was gone about in 1837, at a time when his brain power was seriously impaired and his critical judgment thus gravely unbalanced.

<sup>1</sup> He uses the term "derangement," not to suggest what we call "insanity," but specifying a real physiological trouble.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Autobiography*, pp. 208-9.

And this is not all. Suffering from a brain disturbance probably referable to juvenile overstrain, he actually took up this specially trying task at a time of further overwork.

"The time I bestowed on this," he records, "had to be stolen from occupations more urgent. I had just two months to spare, at this period, in the intervals of writing for the [Westminster] Review. In these two months I completed the first draft of about a third, the most difficult third, of the book [i.e., the Book on Induction in the Logic]. What I had before written I estimate at another third, so that only one-third remained. What I wrote at this time consisted of the remainder of the doctrine of Reasoning (the theory of Trains of Reasoning and Demonstrative Science) and the greater part of the Book on Induction. When this was done I had, as it seemed to me, untied all the really hard knots, and the completion of the book had become a question of time. Having got thus far, I had to leave off, in order to write two articles for the next number of the Review."

And even that is not the whole account of the burdensome conditions under which Mill undertook the most difficult part of his "System." For the whole of his work, as writer of a great treatise on logic, as writer for his Review, and as editor of that Review, was carried on while he was doing his daily duty at the India Office. That was certainly not work of the most exacting kind; but serious and responsible work it was; and he was not the man to neglect it. Need anything further be said to prove that he was grappling with a labour for which the highest brain power was needed, under conditions of actual brain debility and overwork which would have partly unfitted the best of brains for such an undertaking? Is it surprising that the sections of the Logic so handled are finally found to be unsoundly reasoned? Could they have been otherwise?<sup>1</sup>

Once these facts are realized, the talk about Mill's final inadequacy as a constructive logician loses most of its aggressive point. The specialists who have so slowly superseded him never toiled under such burdens. Bradley, indeed,

<sup>1</sup> In this connection we have to take account of a judgment of his own which may seem to clash with that here put. "I have, through life," he writes (*Autobiography*, p. 83), "found office duties an actual rest from the other mental occupations which I have carried on simultaneously with them." But the sense of "rest" from the strain of hard thinking found in serious office work is no proof that the aggregate effort was efficient.

is understood to have suffered from ill health during most of his life ; but he was at least free to give his whole powers to his task. Mill, like Spencer, was actually flawed by a brain affection while he was doing two men's work, in two fields, over and above the intense intellectual labour of reconstructing Logic on scientific lines. To go on disparaging his powers in respect of their final inadequacy to that triple load is to miss the critical essentials of the case. He took upon him, under laming and crushing conditions, tasks which have since been almost labours of life for more or less leisured specialists. Those who express contempt for his miscarriages, as some have done, surely earn short shrift for their own shortcomings. His path-breaking work made theirs possible.

And when we are weighing Mill in the balances let us beware of thinking that, because his very errors are warning-posts to careful thinkers in our day, there has been any general transcending of his teaching. It is the bare truth to say that, in the field of Ethics, there are manuals of modern currency, passing muster in the higher schools, which commit logical contradictions more vital, oversights more inexcusable, than any of his. Among the men who assail him are some whose own thinking is much less competently critical, by the higher standards of our time, than was his by the standards of his age. And on the topic of Theism there is still being propounded, by accredited authorities, reasoning more justly open than was even that of Hamilton to the strictures passed upon that able but capricious thinker by Mill in his "Examination." Mill's tentative theism was a benevolent blunder. Theirs is the pitiable chicanery of men professionally committed to a logically lost cause, and sinking to devices of sophistry and of personal malice which Mill would have utterly disdained. And, be it added, the advocacy of the Little God theory by Professor William James constitutes a riot of self-contradiction such as Mill never came within a mile of. Yet it had a largely respectful and laudatory reception from contemporary critics twenty-five years ago.

## V

In sum, Mill miscarries precisely because, affected as he was by the prophetic environment, he retained too much of the prophetic practice, relying too often on what Emerson calls "the inward augury" when his course should have been to cross-examine the augury by the higher method of which he sought to be the exponent. One of his greatest services as a thinker was to warn men magistrally against vain certitudes—a task begun energetically by Montaigne some three and a half centuries ago, and still as urgent as ever in the intellectual life. Mill's own errors lay in the proclivity to just such certitudes. The hot blast of Carlyle, coming to him when he felt chill in youth from the cold winds of scientific doctrine, against which he had not the fit resort of a natural youthfulness, first repelled his critical intelligence, and then attracted him by its warmth when he came in contact with Carlyle's personality, then not denuded of youthful geniality. But in his letters we can see it partly infecting him with Carlyle's tumultuous reaction against the froward aspects of life.

He was certainly not the "new Mystic" of Carlyle's first guess on reading him; but on Carlyle's impact he acquired something of the mystagogue's mood. Yet, though Mill had more active sense for poetry than Carlyle ever had, it was not a vital thing for him either. The tonic of poetry, of which he makes so much on retrospect, was not for him the medicine it might have been for a more homogeneous nature. There too he was affected by the climate in which he lived; and poetry served him as it did Arnold and Carlyle and so many more in his day, more as a means to edification than as a means to joy.

By heredity or by force of training, Mill had little gift for enjoyment outside of the functioning of his intellect. In the Diary of thoughts which he kept for a few months in 1854 he truly and luminously writes :—

It is an immense defect in a character to be without lightness. A character which is all lightness can excite neither respect nor sympathy.

Seriousness must be the *fond* of all characters worth thinking about. But a certain infusion of the laughing philosopher—an openness to the view of things which, showing them on the undignified side, makes any exaggerated care about them seem childish and ridiculous—is a prodigious help towards bearing the evils of life, and I should think has saved many a person from going mad. It is also necessary to the completeness even of the intellect itself. The contemptible side of things is part, though but a part, of the truth of them; and to be incapable of seeing and feeling that part with as much force and clearness as any other—to be blind to that aspect of things which was the only one the Cynics chose to look at—is to be able to see things only by halves. There always seems something stunted about the intellect of those who have no humour, however earnest and enthusiastic, and however highly cultivated, they often are.

The truth in that connection was never more admirably put; and the wonderful thing is that the very habit of reason should thus illuminate the insight of one who, we may infer, was conscious of some deficiency of the kind he describes. For, partly by reason of his upbringing, he lacked what we may call hygienic levity. "I never was a boy," he once said; "never played at cricket: it is better to let Nature have her own way."<sup>1</sup> Thus brought up, he was the more ready a victim to Carlyle's views on some things; and it is evidently from him that he derived his notion of the latter part of the eighteenth century in England as an age of small souls. In his reactionary period he put that falsism with unbounded conviction. Later, in the recovered use of his judgment, he said the reverse: "the eighteenth century was a great age, an age of strong and brave men."<sup>2</sup>

In that stage (1854) he pronounced that "Carlyle has written himself out," and criticized him keenly<sup>3</sup>:—

Carlyle is abundantly contemptuous of all who make their intellects bow to their natural timidity by endeavouring to believe Christianity. But his own creed—that everything is right and good which accords with the laws of the universe—is either the same or a worse perversion. If it is not a resignation of intellect into the hands of fear, it is the subornation of it by a bribe—the bribe of being on the side of Power—irresistible and eternal Power.

<sup>1</sup> *Caroline Fox: Her Journals and Letters*, ed. 1883, p. 107. Mr. Elliot (*Letters of Mill*, i, p. xxiii) introduces the quotation with: "he wrote sadly." The remark was *not* written, and the diarist says nothing of sadness.

<sup>2</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 205.

<sup>3</sup> *Diary*, at end of *Letters*, ii, 361, 373.

He might indeed have gone further and pointed out that the doctrine is sheer nullity as Theism, seeing that *every* event *must* accord with the laws of the universe, else it could not happen.

Here the reaction against the hollow teaching is as usual ethical, the revolt against all theistic equivocation which inspires the most powerfully reasoned of all his books, the *Examination of Hamilton*. But that the emotional impulse continues to be an imperfect security for sound judgment we have seen in his *Essays on Religion*; and to the end he continues to be capable of unsound judgments on such prompting. One of the strangest is his amazing censure of Gladstone, in a private letter to Dilke in 1870, for not stopping the Franco-German war:—

If Gladstone had been a great man, this war would never have broken out; for he would have nobly taken upon himself the responsibility of declaring that the English navy should actively aid whichever of the two Powers was attacked by the other. This would have been a beginning of the international justice we are calling for. I do not much [!] blame Gladstone for not daring to do it, for it requires a morally braver man than any of our statesmen to run this kind of risk.<sup>1</sup>

Two criticisms may here suffice. In the first place, the British navy could not have prevented the war, which was never a naval one; and could only have started shelling French ports, thereby making France our eternal enemy. In the second place, no British statesman in his senses could have had the effrontery to make his country pose as having such a right of intervention, within less than two decades of its own aggression, with France, in the Crimean War. The thesis is outside argument.

In this case it is significant that he puts a veto on the publication of his opinion, which suggests that after propounding it he felt it was an impossible counsel; but the disparagement of Gladstone is thereby made the more unworthy of him. We can but pronounce that, once more, the emotional impulse has served him ill as a guide to a principle or plan of action. A more thoughtful consideration of the problem would have led him to avow that no British

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, ii, 274.



statesman could sanely intervene as he proposed. And his own principles should have withheld him from assuming that a Prime Minister could of his own volition suddenly impose war on his country in such a case, without consulting either Parliament or the nation. His vehement outbreak is of a piece with his youthful denunciation of the Radicals in Parliament for not attempting all manner of heroic courses, which in the then state of parties could have led to nothing.

Again we realize that the unreasonable censure comes of magnanimity, the courage that calls for courage in others. But again we have to add that this amounts to confessing imperfection in the thinking faculty as such. The leaven of the prophet in the new teacher is his weakness on that side, even if it be part of the driving power to his manifold effort for the rationalization of social processes. He should have remembered how twenty years before he had on a similar emotional impulse committed himself to a political doctrine which ere long he had to renounce, tacitly if not explicitly. In the summer of 1851,<sup>1</sup> invited to approve of a draft prospectus for the new 'Westminster Review,' he declared himself in strong antagonism to all periodicals and persons who professed to stand "for reform and not for revolution." "Instead of thinking," he wrote,<sup>2</sup> "that 'strength and durability are the result only of a slow and peaceful development,' I think that changes effected rapidly and by force are often the only ones which would in given circumstances be permanent." And to the proposition that "reforms to be salutary must be graduated to the average moral and intellectual growth of the community," he vehemently retorted that such a doctrine would have barred the Reformation, the Commonwealth, and the Revolution of 1688; and that were it to prevail "the stupidity and habitual indifference of the mass of mankind would bear down by its dead weight all the efforts of the more intelligent and active-minded few."

That reckless deliverance stood for the general approval of three French revolutions in which he had chimed with

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that he had been married to Mrs. Taylor in the spring of that year.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of John Stuart Mill*, i, 162.

Carlyle from their first acquaintance, and it tells much more of Carlyle's passional attitude on all such matters than of any kind of reflection on the problems involved. Mill had apparently made no attempt to weigh the total consequences of revolutions, either in particular or in general; but had simply taken for granted that where revolutions *did* take place there *could not* have been any peaceful reformation. It is the less necessary here to argue the issue which he so summarily decided, because he never attempted in any of his books to maintain the position taken up in the letter of 1851; and it lies on the face of the case that he was silenced by the next French Revolution—the Coup d'État of Louis Napoleon in 1852, which was incomparably better justified by the subsequent voting than any of the three "popular" revolutions had been by any democratic test.

Neither Mill nor Carlyle, nevertheless, could assent to that exploit, though Carlyle's doctrine of Strong Man rule, and Mill's *à priori* arguments for revolution by minorities against the will of majorities, justified neither in condemning the new Emperor. In the LIBERTY Mill could not avoid laying down principles which bar alike autocratic and factional revolutions; and though he significantly avoids discussing revolution as a special problem—doubtless under pressure of recollection of his attitude in 1851—he, of course, lends it no countenance there or in the book on Representative Government. The fact remained that he, the specialist in political ratiocination, had once laid down an aggressively intuitionist, thoughtless, Carlylean doctrine which could very well have come under the lash of Bentham as an "anarchic sophism."

Fortunately for him, his later choice of themes kept him on paths on which the strongest impression he sets up is that of the seeker for science weighing and testing all the courses open to the society of his time. There is no dazzling display of new insight; there is but an application of the ethico-political method of his father, little complicated by that checking process of historical inquiry which he recognized to be requisite. Hence the scientific inadequacy of the

Ethology section in the *Logic*, and the frequent inconsistency in the reasoning of the treatise on Representative Government. But the very faith in the virtue of reason and the virtue of freedom, especially as expounded in the *LIBERTY*, has an antiseptic virtue which keeps Mill's influence tonic and invigorating. That process of thinking saved him from following up his false start. Carlyle's declaration of dour hostility to the book is the decision which finally classes *him* as a nugatory force, a backwater in the stream of modern movement. The avowal of Kingsley, a Carlylean by temperamental bias,<sup>1</sup> that the reading of the *LIBERTY* made him a better man on the spot, is a typical testimony to the virtue that went from Mill as a dynamic influence on his generation. And that virtue, exercised by a book that is at many points open to rational criticism, is the virtue of the Spirit of Reason, which seeks not to dominate and hypnotize, to overawe by declamation or derision, but to enlist men for justice and reciprocity by arousing in them the fullest play of their own critical faculty.

This is the sufficient answer to the perpetual declamation of Carlyle against resort to "logical analysis" for a way out of the labyrinths of life's problems. He, unable to disentangle his own congenital contradictions, struck out angrily at all who had in any degree the faculty he lacked; continuing to proffer to men a light that was but darkness visible, and ending in confessed apathy and despair, without an oracle save that of Woe! He had acclaimed in succession three French revolutions as ending "the dominion of imposture," only to be disgusted by a fourth which was the dominion of imposture *in excelsis*. Mill, influenced by him in youth to little good, realized at that stage the futility of the intuitionist attitude in politics as in religion, and set himself to cultivate for his age the resources of practical reason by means of the trained intelligence that resulted from his father's upbringing and his heredity. It was the very exercise that saved him, and brought a new sense of

<sup>1</sup> And an admirer of the Carlylean literary method. See *Alton Locke*.

hope into the generation which listened to him. With him, they were experiencing, on a wider scale than it had been undergone by their fathers, a new discipline. For one reader who sat at the feet of his father the younger Mill had ten. If the instrument was still defective enough to be subject to much just criticism, and the discipline imperfect accordingly, they were none the less sufficient to raise the mental levels of a nation. And when we remember how the instrument was strained and flawed by its very preparation, and how devotedly and selflessly it was nevertheless used, there is small room left in a just spirit for anything but admiration and gratitude.

## VI

When we have thus come to a vision of the criticized teacher as a brave spirit carrying a burden at times impossible, our first readjustment, perhaps, may fitly be by way of realizing anew how some of the criticized prophets are to be similarly understood. Carlyle, despite a common notion to the contrary, never toiled as Mill did; but he, too, let us remember, carried his load in an almost constant state of suffering. Dyspepsia, he declared, had cast a gloom over his life even in his prime; and in one of his letters to John Sterling,<sup>1</sup> at that very time in which Mill was setting a weakened brain to the most difficult tasks, he cries: "My dear friend, let us both get well! I do hold it, in my own case, a kind of disgrace and crime to be sick; is it not Nature herself with her great voice that says to me: Fool, seest thou not that thou art *astray*; not in the right road there, but in the wrong one?" The challenge perhaps goes deeper than Carlyle knew. How much of his total output may we not mark down as the expression of a spirit disordered by the flaws of its physical structure?

Ruskin comes under the same inquiry. To see him as he was, not in the idealizing portraits of the artists but in the startling photograph in which he stands beside Rossetti and Bell Scott, already in his youth a frail thing, ill-framed for

<sup>1</sup> In 1836. *Letters to Mill, Sterling, and Browning*, p. 198.

life's long struggle, wincing under the light, is to feel the force of Carlyle's apperception. He is *astray*; he cannot yield us a really sane all-round view of life, a sane reaction to its problems. Carlyle could not reck his own rede. Sterling died young; Carlyle lived long, with little joy in life. Spencer, the most marvellous invalid of them all, fore-casted a time when insanity shall have become an extremely rare malady and the health of the whole race shall have been made normally sound by the systematic development of science. But neither could Spencer reck his own rede. *His* great product is largely the output of a flawed physique, a mind always struggling with the sand in the physical machine.

So considered, the miscarriages of a thinker and teacher take on a new aspect. Coldly to denounce as discreditable the failures of the debile climber to scale the great peaks he has attempted is no longer possible. We may well deduce that the business of posterity is, as the phrase goes, to "keep fit," to breed ever better, so that haply we may have geniuses neither weakened in youth by parental coddling, as was Ruskin, nor lamed by too hard parental discipline, as was Mill; teachers who can fulfil Carlyle's precept to keep well, and who, in consequence, can see life steadily and see it whole, as he never did. Shall we ever have such ideal guides? Is there even any theoretic certainty that genius will cease to be an unstable abnormality, the function of a dangerously poised superiority of gift? Perhaps both teacher and taught, writer and audience, may one day be thus together on a higher plane of good life. And perhaps—some cannot forgo the query—life may be just a little duller withal.

Howsoever that may be, we can make a humane allowance for the age in which the progress had not gone very far. In Mill, for one, we find a thinker, a teacher, a reformer, meet for an age of storm and stress, of newly recognized and hotly resented social evil, of much sadly confused aspiration and much obstinate refusal to reconsider its problems. For, whatever his deficiencies from the standpoint of scientific criticism, he had some of the required qualifications in a rare degree. He who could not assent to the philosophy of

Spencer was cordially ready to furnish the financial support needed to carry on its publication. With an almost heedless courage in defying some of the forces of resistance, a spirit of opposition which made him, as Bain remarks, unprofitably provocative of resentment, he had yet a singular power of persuasion. When he was not moved tartly to tell his fellow countrymen (he often did) how deficient they were in desirable qualities, when he calmly used his critical and his reasoning faculty to trace the reasonable course in a complicated social issue, he brought to multitudes of serious men a new faith in the potentialities of reason. Above all, when he turned his courage to the proclamation of the most vital truth in social science—a truth received by him from his father and never by him abandoned or lightly held: the truth that there is no ultimate total well-being possible for society without control of the birth-rate—he did a service not rendered in his time by any one of his status and his persuasive power. He was indeed at times, as he latterly admitted, harshly and strangely unjust to Grote and other men in Parliament for declining adventurous courses of which they saw the uselessness when he could not. But when he charges upon Grote a lack of courage in facing the population problem, he lays his finger on a real weakness. On those great scores of courage and single-mindedness, of public spirit and entire unselfishness, he still stands, I think, unmatched among the reasoning writers of his age.

Ruskin, it may be replied, had these qualities also. So be it: let him have credit for courage and philanthropy as against his fanaticism and his prophetic egoism. But Mill's is rather the surer service. Like the other, if less passionately, he could err in his diagnoses under recurring stress of misguiding emotion. He could miscarry in his technics as did Ruskin in his æsthetics. But the secret of his special influence, so long almost unchallenged, was that to those of his age who sought reason where others sought authority, who craved light where others craved heat, he gave the most various aid and the most effective encouragement on the path they desired to tread. And can there be in the long run a more

heartening conclusion than this, that even in face of confession of error in the quest we can say that the seeker for right reason has led his tribe on a road which brings them to a larger and a truer vision than his?

Even if we put the test of absolute achievement, we have the clear record that he counted for much in the most progressive legislation of his time. Gladstone, who called him "the Saint of Rationalism," and declared that "he did us all good," was certainly strengthened by him for some of his greatest tasks. And that memorable characterization carries us to a vision of that in Mill which was perhaps the rarest of his endowments—the selflessness which was prepared to confess and renounce error when it was shown to be error.

It was on the point of Mill's freedom from all jealousy that Bain declared that in that aspect his superiority was absolute. Thornton illustrates it. At one of the last meetings of the old India Company, a Director spoke of their famous Petition to Parliament, which Mill had written, as being the work of another official then present, "'with the assistance, as he understood, of Mr. Mill,' likewise present." Thornton, one of the higher staff, was furious, and exploded later to Mill on the subject. Mill placidly replied that the Director was quite right, and when Thornton retorted, "How can you be so perverse? You know that I know that you wrote every word of it," Mill's answer was: "No, you are mistaken; one whole line on the second page was by —." And Thornton has a story of Mill's almost unappeasable anger at a subscription of the staff to present him with a silver inkstand on his retirement.

In view of the records, we are well entitled to say that, had Mill lived to see his scientific miscarriages rationally exposed, no one would have more ungrudgingly assented to the rectification. Again and again he did so with a rare frankness.<sup>1</sup> And this selflessness, on the part of a man

<sup>1</sup> "Mr. Mill's prompt recognition of the importance of Mr. Thornton's refutation of the wage-fund theory is only one out of numberless instances of his peculiar magnanimity." (Fox Bourne's note on Thornton's paper in the *Memorial volume*, 1873.) Thornton's testimony to Mill's unchanging cordiality under all differences of opinion is noteworthy. He appears to have been the

conscious at once of intellectual power and of intellectual backsliding, is as elevating an example and as fruitful an influence as any moral or intellectual leading can well be. It is a turning to new purpose of the virtues of the saints : a wisdom not of the prophets.

## VII

There is a final tribute due to Mill from the side of the women. Professor Kellner of Vienna, who surveys English life and literature with as much intimacy as critical detachment, has lately summed up the modern movement of "emancipation" of women as more substantially the work of Mill than of any other. And there can be no question that his "Subjection of Women," though not the modern starting-point, was long the chief inspiration of that movement in England, the earlier start of Mary Wollstonecraft having ostensibly come to nothing. It is hardly a masterpiece of relevant reasoning or of accurate statement, and it contains a good deal of rash generalization ; but it did much service to the cause not merely of women's enfranchisement but of their education and of the better adjustment of their legal status in marriage.

It is a notable fact that this service to the sex was rendered by a man who only once was in love, and that only on an intellectual affinity, which left him prepared to face a celibate life while conjugal life was barred for him by the survival of the loved one's first husband. Here again in Mill's life is revealed the virtue of the intellectual principle, the bias to "logical analysis" of all problems. It yielded on the one hand, despite the tragic brevity of his happy married life, a finer experience of wedlock than the otherwise tragic experience of Carlyle ; and on the other hand, though Mill's estimate of his wife was in itself a species of hallucination, hardly to be matched in literary biography, it inspired him to his service in the cause of her sex.

friend mentioned by Spencer in *his* paper on Mill as having changed from agreement with Mill to pronounced dissidence on some questions. Fox Bourne notes that Thornton has thus changed his attitude on ethics, and tells how in talk on the subject Mill had remarked : "Yes : it is pleasant to find *something* on which to differ from Thornton."



But in this connection also he presents to us an anomaly—if we can rely on a somewhat questionable piece of evidence. “I heard, I forget from whom, in the course of the past winter,” writes Charles Eliot Norton in his journal in the spring of 1873,<sup>1</sup> “that Mill refused to become acquainted with Mrs. Lewes [*i.e.* ‘George Eliot’], had spoken in terms of the strongest reprobation of her course, and had expressed himself very warmly as to the wrong committed by her in its effect on society, and its influence on women exposed to temptation to violate the conventional relations between man and woman.” The “I forget from whom” of course weakens this testimony; but its emphatic wording challenges attention. Norton held it to be notably congruous with the circumstances of Mill’s own devotion to Mrs. Taylor.

For the present generation, which in large part has moved so far from early Victorian attitudes on the ethics of marriage, the statement must be difficult of acceptance. Already in Mill’s own day, many men and women of the highest character and culture had unhesitatingly accepted George Eliot’s free union with G. H. Lewes, the survival of whose first wife barred their marriage. Harrison, the apostle of Comte, who vetoed all divorce and remarriage; was a frequent caller at The Priory. Could Mill so far conform to what Spencer might have called a standard of “relative ethics” in opposition to “absolute ethics,” as to censure harshly the step which George Eliot took with deliberate resolution?

There appears to be no controlling evidence. We can but note that Mill, writing on “The Subjection of Women,” says no word of Mary Wollstonecraft even where he might be expected to speak of her, when he alludes to<sup>2</sup> Madame de Staël as “the greatest woman who has left behind her sufficient to give her an eminent rank in the literature of her country.” The fact that he pays tribute to George Sand, “whose style acts upon the nervous system like a symphony of Haydn or Mozart,” and names “the illustrious Heloisa,”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, i, 498.

<sup>2</sup> Second ed., p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 129.

might seem to exclude the likelihood of his allowing a moral prejudice to sway him in such a case. But again the non-mention of George Eliot, who already ranked so high in English letters in 1869, with the non-mention of Mary Wollstonecraft, goes to lend colour to the statement that he refused to know an eminent woman who had made a "free union" in disregard of social convention; and in the Life of George Eliot there is no sign that they ever met, despite what might be supposed to be their intellectual affinities.

If the testimony recorded by Norton should prove to be true, it will mark one more instance, and a very striking one, of Mill's capacity to divagate abnormally at times from rational standards under stress of a particular explosion of feeling. His father, we know, was uncompromisingly hostile to any semblance of disrespect to the existing code in such matters; and to that primary attitude Mill could conceivably bring such an inconclusive process of reasoning as that set forth by Norton—a line of argument which, in point of fact, might have been (and was) directed even against his own intimate friendship with Mrs. Taylor, to say nothing of his gospel of revolution.

If we had always found him faithful to right reason in his pronouncements on problems of public and individual action, we might have refused to think him capable of so arbitrary an attitude as that under consideration. But as we have seen him from time to time, under stresses of feeling, take up even more unreasonable positions,<sup>1</sup> we cannot pronounce the testimony incredible. It leaves us freshly impressed with the difficulty of carrying the lamp of reason at all times with a steady hand, even for one who might be held to have "subdued the flesh" as perfectly as any ever did. To be ascetic, in fine, is not to be unflexible by errant emotion: it may be in some degree a manifestation thereof. However that may be, the singularity of the phenomenon here is worthy of the exceptionalness of Mill's entire case, and leaves him, critically speaking, more interesting than ever.

<sup>1</sup> His latter attitude towards his sisters (see above, p. 4, *note*) must be left an open question.

## HERBERT SPENCER

### I

It is quite an open question whether, even if we can agree upon a definition of genius, we affirm anything decisive when we call any writer a man of genius. We are in effect saying that he is a person of exceptional natural endowment, the possessor of a degree of (it may be a single) faculty which most men could not attain to by any amount of industry. Seeing, however, that a man of genius may, apart from his special faculty, be something of a fool, a blunderer, even a rather detestable egoist, the characterization is apt to set up intellectual confusion. Still, it is perhaps of some critical importance to realize that Herbert Spencer is fitly to be spoken of as a man of genius.

When the proposition was hazarded a generation ago some people called it a paradox, by which *they* meant an audacious denial of an established truth, such as is committed by those who say the earth is flat. A paradox, let us patiently re-assert, is nothing of that kind; the word properly means an assertion which seems false, but on scrutiny can be shown to be true. Such actually was the doctrine of Copernicus; and to make the term mean merely audacious nonsense is to put a word out of useful action. What was felt by those who so repugned was that Spencer had none of the supposed symptoms of genius. He wrote neither poetry nor eloquent prose. He discussed matter-of-fact questions; and, if Education be admitted to be a great and high question, still he discussed it in a matter-of-fact manner. He never got excited like Carlyle or Ruskin. And so with Evolution, and Sociology, and Biology, and Psychology, and Ethics; always he offered his reader clear, calm reasoning—"cold," the worshippers of genius would call it; in fact, he was just a sort of scientific man.

And it may really be useful for such good people to realize that Newton and Darwin are as fitly as Shelley to be termed men of genius,<sup>1</sup> and that Spencer may arguably be so conceived. He *has*, in fact, a number of the special marks which lead most people to fall back on the concept of genius when characterizing Carlyle and Ruskin. As Mr. Hugh Elliot has very suggestively put it :—

Spencer [as contrasted with Mill] was almost completely inaccessible to ideas out of harmony with his natural modes of thought. He scarcely read at all ; when he did, it was usually novels ; for many years of his life he never succeeded in reading a serious book for a longer period than an hour at a stretch. Spencer, in fact, never studied ; his philosophy welled up of its own accord from the depths of his mind ; it was a spontaneous outgrowth from his experience of life. He had a natural facility for attracting from every quarter facts which bore upon any theory he was promulgating, though without any effort to himself. It follows from this habit of mind that Spencer, though he could accumulate great stores of knowledge on any subject on which he had theorized, was plunged in abysmal ignorance on subjects on which he had formed no theory. Of history he knew nothing, of English literature very little, of German literature not a word. The difference between him and Mill could scarcely be more marked.<sup>2</sup>

One may venture a doubt as to whether that account of Spencer's reading, which certainly proceeds on his own deliberate testimony, is safely to be taken quite literally. When we study the "Principles of Sociology" and note the body of references and the bibliography compiled for Spencer by Mr. P. R. Smith and Mr. Henry Tedder for the third edition of the work, it becomes very hard to understand how the author contrived to make 2,500 references to 455 books without having done a good deal of reading.<sup>3</sup> I confess to

<sup>1</sup> In his essay on Charlotte Bronte Sir Leslie Stephen wrote : "Genius,..... manifested in any high degree, must be taken to *include* intellect if the words are to be used in this sense" [of combined reflective and imaginative faculty]. "Genius begins where intellect ends" (*Hours in a Library*, ed. 1892, iii, 5). I cannot see how those propositions can be reconciled.

<sup>2</sup> Intro. to the *Letters of J. S. Mill* (1910), pp. xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>3</sup> His own statement (*Facts and Comments*, p. 108) as to that work in particular is that he engaged David Duncan, Richard Scheppig, and James Collier to do a large amount of reading and abstracting for him for the purposes of the "Descriptive Sociology," and that "With much material I had accumulated in the course of many years I incorporated a much larger amount of

a suspicion that Spencer's consciousness of originality and concentration of purpose tended to make him in this direction minimize his natural debt to other writers, as I think he admittedly did in other respects. As to the hour limit, let us remember that in most years of his adult life he could do no work of *any* kind for more than an hour at a time, by reason of his malady. The reasonable inference seems to be that, reading only where and when he felt thoroughly interested, he assimilated whatever he read with great quickness and thoroughness; and even if he never read more than an hour at a time he must have done a great many hours' reading.

As for his general knowledge of the physical sciences, he must either have done as much reading in that direction, in the same fashion, or have profited in a special degree by the talk of men with special knowledge;<sup>1</sup> and that, after all, is only an equivalent way of acquiring information from without. It would be well, then, to amend Mr. Elliot's phrase about his philosophy welling up from his own mind by saying that he acquired concrete information swiftly and easily, and that his originality lay in his high faculty for generalizing it and seeing the scientific and philosophic inferences it would bear—or some of them. So regarded, he is still fitly to be described as a man of genius. As Mr. Elliot goes on:—

When George Eliot asked Spencer how it was that he had no wrinkles on his forehead, as might be expected in one who had thought deeply, he replied that it was because he was never puzzled. His inactive disposition recoiled from the notion of wrestling with a problem in an attempt to solve it. Whenever he was confronted with a problem whose solution was not obvious to him he would push it aside and abandon all conscious effort to solve it. But the matter would not usually be entirely lost sight of; it would stick in the back of his mind, and by-and-by, very likely while thinking of something else, a little inward flash would occur, rendering the solution somewhat less obscure than it was before. With the lapse of time other

material derived from these compilations when writing the *Principles of Sociology* and Part II of the *Principles of Ethics*."

<sup>1</sup> In this connection he makes no mention of engaging any one to read and abstract for him.

flashes would follow ; and after several years, maybe, the solution of that problem would be set forth with the marvellous lucidity that Spencer commanded, as an integral portion of his system of philosophy. That is what we describe as true genius ; no pushing, no conscious effort, no weary drudgery or labour, nothing that education can ever supply ; simply a succession of sudden inward flashes illuminating the whole of the darkened field.<sup>1</sup>

That account of the matter, though phrased too sweepingly, I think, is broadly true. But we may profitably apply here Spencer's habit of seeking to find the common element in things ostensibly different ; and when Mill is represented as a complete contrast to Spencer in that he "never abandoned a puzzle" we must, I think, modify the proposition. Mill did very completely and memorably abandon a puzzle in the case of his scheme of Ethology—his proposed science of national characters. And Spencer never professed to find the solution of the puzzle of electricity, after taking it up and dropping it from time to time in the fashion Mr. Elliot describes. Neither did he, I think, carry far the psychology of æsthetics, though in the "Principles" he finally makes a real advance on the tentatives of the Essays, and though he finally confuted the utilitarian æsthetics of Arnold.

It should be here added that there remain *lacunæ* in Spencer's statement of the fundamentals of æsthetics. In terms of his own express doctrine that "the chief component of mind is feeling" ("Facts and Comments," p. 25), which seems to be put in oblivion of his much deeper generalization in the "Principles of Psychology," he is disentitled to speak of "the *antagonism* between intellectual appreciation and emotional satisfaction" (*id.* p. 33). There is often positive pleasure, = emotional satisfaction, *in* or *with* the process of intellectual appreciation. It is in fact true that every recog-

<sup>1</sup> In his later volume (1917) on Herbert Spencer, Mr. Elliot strikes a somewhat different note. Among other remarks on Spencer he has this (p. 54) : "For it must be noted that in appearance and conversation the *bourgeoisie* was tolerably conspicuous." The sentence impeaches, chiefly, Mr. Elliot. Elsewhere (p. 59) he mentions that "Spencer was pre-eminently simple and unadorned in manner." On p. 56 he seems to suggest that Spencer was a case of "supernatural acuity of vision" in a one-idea'd mind, which might even be "inferior." But the passage is ill-developed. Other allusions to "Victorian banality" (p. 58) indicate a negligible mood.

nition of a new truth which is not actually *discomforting* is a pleasurable experience, and when there *is* discomfort there is an emotional process. It was probably one of the consequences of Spencer's brain flaw that he thus frequently fell into theoretic self-contradiction. The ostensible antagonism between emotion and intellect when the promptings of the former are sought to be made paramount over the criticism of the latter must not lead us to suppose that they are incongruous factors. It is the intellectual malpractice of the individual that sets up the impression of a standing feud between the two sides of mind.

Speaking broadly, I infer that such a flaw obstructed Spencer's recollection of his own doctrines. In "Facts and Comments" he has a paper on "The Regressive Multiplication of Causes," of which the culminating proposition is that "We have to regard each cause we see in operation as resulting from an integration of causes, or rather of forces, conditions, antecedents, becoming more complex with each step of retrogression carrying us back to an infinite complexity." This statement he puts as rightly belonging to "First Principles"; and he speaks of it as "what I have *recently discovered* should have been set forth as part of the general doctrine contained in that work." It always seemed to me to be obviously implicit in it, though he tends to dwell on "effects" rather than "causes."

For the rest, when Mill did get his solutions, right or wrong, they were really attained in the same way as Spencer's, by the "sudden flash" of illumination, which is happily not a specialty of genius, but is really the experience of all students when they master any obscure problem set to them, be it the Differential Calculus, or the law of international exchanges, or a riddle, or the confutation of a clever fallacy.

But that, unhappily, is not the whole of the matter. Mill's flashes, from time to time, were illusory. He thought he had brought a mental tangle into clear arrangement when he had not done so at all, but had only verbally given an aspect of coherence to sets of propositions which do not cohere. And, with resignation be it spoken, Spencer, though

possessed of a great power of co-ordination in some fields on which Mill hardly attempted to operate, was also astray again and again in supposing that he had solved a complex problem when he had only framed either an inadequate generalization or a wrong hypothesis. To take a simple and concrete case: he early (1857) framed a theory of the origin of music, which in substance amounts to saying that music is a development or variant of speech. Like every exploration which Spencer carefully undertook, the essay is full of interest, observation, and suggestion, but it does not finally satisfy, because it does not adequately deal with the fundamental difference of aim between speech and song. It is an instance of the miscarrying effort to find the roots of the æsthetic in the useful. It is as if we derived portrait and landscape painting from hieroglyphics because each is a representation of ideas to the eye. Here, as at times elsewhere, his evolutionism is not "genetic."

In his old age, dealing with some of the many criticisms passed on his essay, Spencer complained<sup>1</sup> that he had in effect been criticized for not giving a complete theory of developed music when he had only professed to give a theory of origins. But he had really put his theory in view of and with frequent reference to developed music; and he had not adequately or indeed at all brought out the fact that in the origin of music there is a specific factor which is psychically quite distinct from those involved in the causation of speech. And he failed to see this when replying, with his usual dialectic energy, to his critics, and to Mr. Ernest Newman in particular.

To say this is not to belittle him. Mr. Newman, I doubt not, would cordially avow a great debt to Spencer for intellectual stimulation of all kinds, and for special stimulus to critical thought in this very connection. For the critics of Spencer are still, I think, at issue among themselves. To every problem that Spencer handled he imparted some new aspect of order. But it would be a bad mistake to suppose,

<sup>1</sup> *Facts and Comments*, p. 40.



in his or any other case, that the "flashes" which come to a genius that works only spontaneously, and refuses to toil continuously over any problem, are thereby certificated as truth. As a whole he presents the curious anomaly of a thinker who not merely, like Mill, warns us against unwarranted certitudes, but at certain points argues in effect that there can be no certitude, in the sense of what he calls comprehension, over any ultimate analytical judgment; and yet upon nearly every controversial aspect of thought and action is extremely sure he is right, both in theory and in practice. That is almost as much the mark of the ever-reasoning Spencer as it is of Carlyle and Ruskin and any other prophet, though he is far saner in his delimitations, always speaks as one offering proofs, and never puts on the airs of the oracle or the Sibyl. In that aspect we may now usefully reconsider him.

## II

Spencer came noticeably before his countrymen first in 1855 as the author of a remarkable treatise on Psychology, originally studied by very few people by reason of its acceptance of the novel and alarming conception of Evolution; then, for a larger audience, as a writer of able ratiocinative essays on a great variety of social, ethical, psychological, and scientific problems, all of which he handled with uncommon clearness and argumentative force. From the first he is visibly a great recruit to the school of Reason. Whosoever loved the appeal to argument, to independent judgment, to clarified and rectified common-sense, found in him some of the satisfaction that was given to intuitionists by the Carlyles and Ruskins and Emersons. He was clearly of the tribe of Mill and Bentham, who sought first and last to make men *see with* them in matters of humanist science as do the men of the physical sciences. And as such he was hateful to many of the opposing tribe, and antipathetic to most.

In the nature of the case, he relied as a writer on clearness, not on the eloquence which carries emotional assent in

advance of or in independence of judgment properly so called. Not yet, I think, have we seen a combination of the expressional gift of a Rousseau or a Ruskin in combination with the thinking and judging faculty of a Newton or a Dalton or a Darwin. Burke is a quite doubtful case of such combination, as was Berkeley. The late William James was, I think, unequalled among philosophers in sheer dexterous felicity of utterance of his thought;<sup>1</sup> but he is perhaps also unparalleled, among professors, in untrustworthiness as a thinker. And perhaps the world is coming to see that, whether or not mastery of phrase will ever be combined with mastery in right thinking, there is a kind of relative mastery which is more important for all the purposes of instruction—the power, that is, of clear and intelligible statement of clear and well-considered thought.

That that is a literary merit at all some people will never admit; and the extensive and estimable class which hates to do any kind of “dry” or difficult thinking will continue to argue that the writer who cannot make his thoughts clear to *them*, without any effort of attention on their part, “cannot write.” More reasonable people will recognize that Spencer and Mill, though they never dreamt of capturing conviction by a mere hypnotizing operation on the instrument of language, were good writers. As men spontaneously concerned much more about the substance of thought than about the expressional form of it, much more in love with reasoning and argument than with diction, they not merely miss charm of phrase and cadence but are apt to be incorrect in sentence construction—a defect at times noticeable, by the way, even in men and women both gifted and practised in the art of writing, as Newman and Arnold and George Eliot. But the simple fact that both Spencer and Mill had unquestionably a great and wide acceptance in their day among thoughtful readers, as distinguished from the experts of philosophy and

<sup>1</sup> The late F. H. Bradley is justly extolled for the force and precision of *his* style; but what passed even in his case as felicities were somewhat frequently flings of rhetoric that in no way helped the process of thinking. He often evades an analysis by means of a metaphor.

science, is a sufficient proof that Spencer and Mill wrote well for *them*. Let the careful reader of the "Principles of Psychology" ask himself whether *that* could have been on the whole better written, in point at once of clearness and conciseness. I doubt whether he will say it could, even if he demurs to any of the reasoning. Certainly no one else in Spencer's day could have written it so well. In the next generation William James certainly writes far more brilliantly, but he stands on Spencer's shoulders, and in *his* case the thinking is assuredly not impeccable. *Good* writing, on scientific themes, is not a matter of epigram, or titillation of the literary sense.

Kant and Hegel had their expert devotees in despite of a marked incapacity—at least in Kant's case—for attractive utterance. Mill and Spencer aroused the admiration and won the allegiance of many who were not professed experts in thought analysis, and they did it by a gift of statement that was entirely adequate to their thought. Mr. Elliot justly dwells on Spencer's "marvellous lucidity";<sup>1</sup> and we may add that Spencer, in his own way, and on his less savourful topics, took as much trouble as Macaulay to be crisp, concrete, and comprehensible by all who cared to do any thinking at all. Metaphors he never much affected; but many times he catches his reader with some pithy opening apologue or illustrative vignette. Whatever he may have thought of average judgment, he took no little pains to be as interesting as his subject admitted of.

And his strategy did not end there. From his start, Spencer is very evidently resolved to do as little as may be to alienate any part of his public in advance. The slight attention paid at the outset to his Psychology by reason of the utter unpreparedness of the orthodox English multitude

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Elliot, who has since partly swung from the attitude of a "fervent admirer" to that of a disillusioned critic (see the editorial preface to his *Herbert Spencer*, 1917), writes (p. 64) that Spencer's style latterly "hardened into an almost deadly monotony and an outward symbol of the wooden dogmatism into which he gradually sank." Mr. Elliot's critical method suffers from proclivity to the superlative, and the judgment here is extravagant. The *Facts and Comments* is a quite readable book, and many of its readers will not forget the closing article, as Mr. Elliot appears to have done.

to conceive of Evolution warned him to be as conciliatory as possible. But though he does seem to have gone on for some time using theistic expressions in some of his books, as the "Education," after he had dismissed theism from his thinking, there was in him a strong mental tendency—or complex of tendencies—which recoiled from all that savoured of the revolutionary, in mental no less than in social life. This should, I think, be recognized as a quite definite idiosyncrasy of his, though it was coupled with a no less marked bias to criticism of all the thought and action going on around him. To put it summarily, in advance, he did not philosophically unify his proclivities, but remained to the end to some extent a strong faggot of contradictions, here partly resembling most of the prophets.

The phenomenon, in fact, goes far to bear out the phrenological conception of personality as rather an aggregate than a unity, a psychic republic in which the president, the will, is but the mouthpiece and instrument of the faculties or propensities that are for the moment in the ascendant. Some republics are tolerably homogeneous, some exceptionally lawless. But it is probably as rare among the greatest as among the weakest to find a mind that can claim never to have "contradicted itself"—as we describe the process of contradicting one doctrine by another.

### III

From the outset, indeed, Spencer expressly insisted on what Kant calls the antinomies of thought as part of the very statement of the philosophic problem. In the very nature of things, he insisted, we are faced on all sides by contradiction when we seek to think things out. We are forced to assume, he tells us, that under our processes of knowing there is some "substance" which we generalize as Mind, but we cannot possibly know it as such. In the same way, we are led alike by science and philosophy to conclude that "behind" the phenomena of the Universe (he always uses that unwarrantably anthropomorphic term) there is an Infinite Energy

that is the Reality of which all that we know are the phenomenal Appearances. And that Infinite Energy and Reality, of the existence of which we feel sure, is nevertheless, by reason of the very nature of our minds, of the Human Mind, absolutely and for ever Unknowable. We are at once sure that it *Is*, and that we cannot know anything about it. To say that we know it to be Unknowable is, he rather weakly concedes, to say that we do know something "about it." But that, he repeats, is part of the fatality of the case, like our necessary belief in an Infinite Extension which our minds cannot grasp.

To pause over the logical and the psychological problem—to ask whether this dichotomy of Appearance and Reality is not a verbal confusion of our own making; and whether "*the* Unknowable" is a permissible formula in a philosophy which posits the ultimate unknowableness of anything beyond connections of phenomena in any area of inquiry—would be to preclude any general view of Spencer in brief space. The thing to note here is that he did thus think, and formulate and avow the contradictoriness of the aspects of life and thought. When, then, he came to the handling of the concrete and passional contradictions of men's beliefs and aspirations, religious and political, it was natural to him, and not a mere device for the conciliation of the pious, to hold that there was some conceptual truth on both sides of the contradiction; that the Theist and the Atheist, the Tory and the Radical, alike stand for an element of truth or rightness; and that they may be made to see this, and cease to conflict as they do.

Abstractly put, it sounds eminently humanistic, so to speak. But the trouble is, on the philosophic side, that the proposition comes under the ban of its own implications. If *all* conflicting opinions have in them a false and a true element, what is the false element *here*? Spencer, it is to be supposed, would reply that he has framed a new generalization, not truly conflicting with either of the others; but that will not avail. It certainly conflicts with the belief that a given religion is wholly and divinely true. And when,

following the only open road, that of analysis, we analyse his argument and his conclusions, we find none of the characteristics of a scientific solution. "Religion," he tells us, contains one indestructibly true element—the belief that the Reality behind the universe is Unknowable. Science, he strangely implies, has denied this, and its denial is false. For those propositions, what is the proof? What *is* "Religion"?

The theorist has unavowedly made an abstraction which represents no known body of religious belief whatever, and which is the reverse of what is either tacitly or explicitly alleged by nearly every body of religious doctrine in the past. Putting aside the illusory phantom of Abstract Religion, we find that religious creeds, churches, communities, documents, always claim to give us a *knowledge* of the Power "behind the universe." Christians expressly claim that God has "revealed Himself." Every world-religion save Buddhism—and that in practice if not in theory—has professed to give information about God or the Gods. Greek and Roman and Semitic and Asiatic and African and Polynesian polytheisms alike proffer endless false information about the powers behind the universe. That was their very ground and function. To say that a million such proffers of information are all logically or virtually reducible to the proposition that *no such knowledge is possible* is a strange pronouncement. Spencer has presented as the abstraction of Religion the one doctrine that no creed ever contained (save in incidental formulas such as: "God is past finding out," which are constantly contradicted in part by positive propositions), and that most creeds explicitly and implicitly deny.

"Science," in this formula, has been as arbitrarily abstracted as "Religion." In any general sense, the word can properly mean only (*a*) the body of generally accepted results of scientific inquiry, or (*b*) the body of principles on which the sciences commonly proceed. And when, in either of these senses, or in any sense, did "science" pronounce that the totality of the Infinite Universe is either known or knowable? If particular men of science ever said it, which

is doubtful, innumerable more men of science had reiterated those formulas which *some* religious men had advanced to check the pretensions of their fellows to "know God"; and when scientific men had on the other hand employed theistic formulas, they were expressing not Science but Religion. It is one of the queerest anomalies in modern doctrine that Spencer, the Agnostic, should in effect represent Religion to have been heretofore, or to be at bottom, essentially Agnostic, and "Science," of all things, to have professed to know how the universe is governed. The doctrine that an Infinite Universe and its causation are unknowable by man is a *scientific* proposition; and to say that it is either the germ or the upshot of Religion is to negate the gist of religious history. Religion, indeed, is in origin an attempt to reach science, an attempt to *explain* the universe; but when it is established and enforced in the teeth of all question, it becomes the negation of science, which exists by perpetual inquiry. To call the negative doctrine, finally, a ground of reconciliation between Religion and Science, is only to force the recognition that it is the surrender of Religion to Science, for all who accept it.

Before such a theorem, despite our knowledge of Spencer's sincere proclivity to finding truths in both progressive and anti-progressive positions, it is impossible not to feel that he was giving his proclivity the rein with an eye to something else than either scientific or philosophic truth. He was putting in the forefront of a philosophic system which rejected all theistic hypotheses, a prolusion which sought to placate theists by assuring them that he was not an Atheist. He was one in any natural sense of the term; and no professed Atheists of his time, so far as literature shows, stood on any other ground than his. His assumption that they professed to "explain" the Infinite Universe was wholly astray; and he was poorly misrepresenting them. At the same time, he was as materialistic as any other modern thinker; yet he seeks to repudiate Materialism in general at the expense of writers whom he does not name.

It remains a fine question whether he gained anything by

it. He admits that Part I of "First Principles," in which he deals with these matters, is not really a foundation for what follows; which pretty well amounts to saying that it had no business to be there. And he confesses that by seeming to put it as a basal argument he misled and antagonized many readers. Did he, then, conciliate many others? It is reasonably to be inferred that he did. His strategic sense had not wholly misled him. Throughout his life he had the respectful attention of multitudes of readers whom he had comforted in advance by assuring them that they were essentially religious people in that they stood at the point of view which in point of fact was held by Atheists and Agnostics. The comfort seems mysterious, but they evidently had it. And while among the really religious people, the people inheriting and clinging to intuitional faiths, many hated him in the good old religious way; and while, further, academic hostility to him prevailed on a wide scale, quite a number of humane clerics and academics were willing to have him buried in Westminster Abbey, like Darwin.

On the other hand, insofar as he put himself in competition with Comtism as supplying either a "religion" or a religious emotion to the religiously inclined by way of a hypostasis of "The Unknowable," he could be confuted even by the simple dialectic of Mr. Frederic Harrison. Of the absurdities of the "Religion of Humanity," theoretic and practical, Spencer could have given as mordant an account as did Mill or Huxley; but when it came to matching the Synthetic Philosophy against the Comtist cult-machinery as a means of titillating the "religious instinct" and winning the adherence of its victims, the thinker, stripped of his armour, was the spoil of Comtist rhetoric. That he should have come to this pass is perhaps the sufficient condemnation of his religious thesis. His scientific readers needed but to repeat once more, *Tantum religio*.

#### IV

Certainly Spencer had reason to plan for popularity on some lines. The large volume of critical and academic detrac-



tion which had accumulated before his death, and is still perceptible, stands for something more than non-acceptance of his views. His general outlook on the universe has certainly not been discredited: it is in sum the attitude of science, of which the dominion grows daily more assured. The disparagement probably arises on three grounds: his manner, his matter, and an academic resentment of his large claim to cover the whole field of thought, with little, if any, recognition of academic claims—indeed, with a general suggestion that academic minds were everywhere ill prepared for a system of thought in which the objective is always Causation.

And while this latter charge was largely justifiable, it is not to be disputed that he gave openings to hostility. Few publicists, indeed, can be set above him in respect of rectitude in controversy and sustained courtesy; but sheer rectitude and formal courtesy are not necessarily winning qualities. Spencer, certainly, never won the general affection which was given to Mill, who often conveyed to his readers a vibration of warm feeling that Spencer did not arouse. What warmth he had was apt to emerge in his opposition to progressive political aspirations. And in their books no less than in their personalities the two men were correspondingly different. The praise of selflessness, of general unconcern about his own claims, so fully earned by Mill, is not to be allotted to Spencer. No writer of his age, perhaps, was less given to proclaiming the services of other men, or acknowledging his own intellectual debts to any; or more determinedly careful to claim originality for himself. When he admits a debt to Von Baer, it is with no such stress as he puts into his claims for himself. And even where such claims are just they are unattractive.

But let us be just to the personality we are studying. Spencer had a harder battle to fight than Mill's, a financial struggle such as Mill never had to face. Further, he had planned a greater undertaking than any of Mill's; and it is, I think, the simple truth that only an intense self-will could have accomplished the task under Spencer's conditions. For

he, let us remember, was lamed at least as much as Mill ever was by that most serious of disabilities, an overstrain of brain structure. It was in 1855, over his first great work, "The Principles of Psychology," on which he probably did the hardest and most original of all his thinking,<sup>1</sup> that he had that alarming experience which he could only describe as "a sensation," but which instantly drove him, for safety, away from his desk, and of which the mischief, carefully watched throughout the rest of his life, was never cured.

Never could he afterwards do what we call a day's work; and, as he said, what men called a good dinner would have killed him. When once we realize that the vast undertaking of "The Synthetic Philosophy" was carried out under such conditions as these, criticism of his self-regarding attitude becomes in itself one-sided if it does not take them into full account. Only a spirit charged with an absorbing sense of the greatness of its task could ever have carried that shaken organism through its circumnavigation of the intellectual globe; only an overcharge of self-regarding instinct could have kept it so strung with purpose to the end. The fact that a grave mishap of overstrain, of which the resulting physiological flaw was irremovable, should have happened to one so firmly convinced as was Spencer of the need for proportioning mental work to physical conditions, is at least a proof that he had not spared himself; and if thenceforward his metaphysical faculty is found inadequate it is precisely what was to be expected.

But we are conditioned by qualities as well as by deficiencies, and Spencer's predispositions are salient, from his boyhood onwards. If Mill underwent too much juvenile discipline, Spencer experienced too little. He would learn nothing, he tells us, but what interested him, thus wholly escaping the classics—an item which in itself provoked academic hostility, where Mill was above it. If to that datum

<sup>1</sup> "As it is" [despite its being planned without reference to the principle of natural selection] "Spencer's Psychology is of the first importance in the history of the subject; and even now is far better worth reading than the great majority of text-books which have been produced since his time" (H. Elliot, as cited, p. 291).

we added the claim that he read as little as possible, we should be driven to conclude that he essayed many portions of his task with inadequate information and preparatory exercise. And it seems not unlikely that his small discipline in languages, which appears never to have extended beyond a little French, is part of the explanation of his mishandling of some problems of reasoning in both the "First Principles" and the "Psychology." When he argued that we could not say of both Space and Time that it was "a nothing," because that would be to assert that there are "two kinds of nothing," he not merely put a wholly grotesque proposition but suggested to us that with all his grasp of real problems he had not realized that language is merely a defective instrument of thought. He seems at times to identify things with words to an extent not matched by any rival thinker, unless we say that Hegel outwent him in hypostatizing Nothing into an entity.

The futility of that particular argument as to "two kinds of nothing," which might serve as a refusal to deny the existence of Jupiter and Jehovah, or of griffins and centaurs, must often have been brought to his notice; but it remains unchanged in the definitive edition of "First Principles," as if the verbalism had permanently hypnotized him. And such a performance may be held to account sufficiently for at least some of the academic hostility to Spencer's name and memory. If Mill found him "absurd," Bradley well might. Self-will apparently blinded him to his most serious fallacies, despite the fact that he amended a number of minor fallacies of his own, and great fallacies of other people.

Academics in these matters are in their turn undisciplined. Most of them commit blunders like other people; but it is their wont to seize on the blunders of the "outsider" as proofs of his incompetence, without confessing even to themselves that their own blunders can give ground for the same charge. They may be, as the judge said of himself and his colleagues, "conscious of each other's infirmities"; but, somewhat like the doctors, they are committed to an etiquette which discountenances exposures within "the profession,"

while there is unanimity in disparaging "quacks." Bradley, indeed, violently assailed Sidgwick ; and it might have done Bradley good at points to be so assailed in turn. But on the whole the academics, until recent years, at least in England, have maintained a professional attitude of superiority to Spencer, who was revolutionizing opinion without taking them into account.

How far the hostility to him was political it is hard to say. On that side he stands out very peculiarly, for an evolutionist. So possessed was he by the sense of the risks of miscalculation in social or political change that he became finally opposed to almost every legislative proposal. His own early scheme of land reform in the "Social Statics" he had recanted on practical as distinct from theoretic grounds ; and other people's schemes fared no better at his hands. The burden of his treatise "*Man versus the State*" is that most acts of legislation are proved to be mistaken by their having to be either repealed or amended. Here he fails to come to theoretic grips with his own theory of mental and social evolution, and we must do it for him. By his own account, in his handling of the question of religion, all widely prevalent beliefs must be reckoned to be so in respect of being adapted to the conditions of the time in which they subsist. But the very doctrine of Evolution, which alleges a continual transmutation, must always be reducing the adaptation of certain beliefs to many of the minds holding them. Further, no change can represent an absolutely complete and permanent truth, though some adjustments as to conduct may be more durable than others.

How, then, are we to make social and political progress if the very fact of having to amend a given innovating Act is to be held on retrospect to discredit it from the beginning ? By Spencer's own teaching, not only no law save a negative or prohibitive one, but no *custom*, can remain absolutely right in relation to a Society for more than a certain period, since social change is perpetual. Then it is no discredit of

a given piece of legislation to say that after a few years it had to be followed by an amending law. That is what, on the Evolution theory, was to be expected. Spencer's criticism of political experiments is thus inconclusive; and his resulting doctrine of "Administrative Nihilism," as Huxley unfairly labelled it, is unsatisfactory alike to the logical and to the moral sense, though it is not wholly disposed of by saying so.

The most serious shortcoming of Spencer as a political thinker was perhaps directly traceable to his instinct of originality. It was difficult for him to accept and stress any important truth unless he could give it a form belonging to his own thought. While, therefore, he could not fail to see the vital quality of the Law of Population, his singularism set him against assenting to that inculcation of Birth Control to which the Mills and others were committed at an early date. They took the straightforward course of indicating the evil and prescribing avoidance, believing that man's upward progress must be at least in part controllable by his judgment, enlightened by his knowledge. Spencer, perversely as it now seems, preferred to argue that the disastrous over-pressure of the sexual instinct would somehow be fortuitously cured, inasmuch as the increasing intellectuality of man would lessen his fecundity.

Such a proposition was inconsistent with the bulk of his own commentary on life, and with his own express insistence on the inadequacy of the intellectual factor in the lives of the majority. It has in fact been stultified for all practical purposes by the experience of a hundred years. Where procreation dwindles through lack of proclivity, it is as an outcome not of intellectual development but of neurosis; where the birth-rate is hopefully controlled it is by way of self-regarding calculation; and the spring of blind instinct is still stronger than any controlling preventive force. On this central issue Spencer's teaching, I think, must be pronounced to be left high and dry. It is as if the partial immobilization of his own life by malady had made his mind inadaptable to the truth that human evolution works, and must work, at least partly through rational choice.

Hence what we may term a prevailing Negativism in his attitude to all movement. This figures as a kind of constitutional offset or balance to his critical faculty. In his early essays, as in that on "Manners and Fashion," we find him spontaneously and intelligently hostile to the wasteful fatuities of custom, bent on discrediting them, and actively calling for freer and saner life in the plain interests of all concerned. Yet even here he is always alive not only to the fact of inertia but to the danger of hasty change; and he balances the account by deciding that, "on the average, restrictions of every kind *cannot* last much longer than they are wanted, and *cannot* be destroyed much faster than they ought to be."<sup>1</sup> All governmental restraints, he feels, arise out of "the unfitness of the aboriginal man for social life," and "they must one and all come to an end as humanity acquires complete adaptation to its new conditions."<sup>2</sup> But when it comes to the purposive making of any serious change, the inhibitory sense always operates. He seems to forget that no belief can ever pass away without having been effectively assailed by somebody as wrong.

As regards religion, we are always to remember that every belief, from fetishism upwards, was fitted to the stage of thought and knowledge in which it arose—the futile truism upon which Comte, in turn, always fell back when criticism generalized religion as delusion. It amounts to arguing that "whatever is, is right"—*while* it is; and that no society ever held a belief or a custom that was harmful to its life. The obvious answer to the implicit plea is that we must just do our best at all stages to see and state the whole truth. Again and again, from the essay on Progress onwards, Spencer himself condemns "the profoundest of all infidelity—the fear lest the truth be bad." But when you are fixedly conscious that "the truth" is for each what he can see to be truth, it needs a living interest in the struggle to make you zealous in propaganda. And Spencer and Comte had this in common, that they were by cast of mind chiefly zealous for

<sup>1</sup> *Essays*, i, 114.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 92.

the propaganda which could establish their systems. People concerned to make it concretely clear that notions accepted as truth were delusions, always set up in them a sense of the unpreparedness of the majority for new truth and for consequent change of action.

Logically speaking, the recoil is sheer inconsistency, at least in Spencer's case. If bad customs and false beliefs must go when they cease to be fitting, the business of the reformer is to proclaim as widely as may be their badness and falsity, thus hastening the process by opening the eyes of as many as may be. If *he* is to be passive, who will be active? If folly and falsity are ever to be put away, how can it be done otherwise than by exposing them? Spencer, constitutionally cordial only for the exposition of the general theory—*his* theory—holds back. When it comes to attacking the concrete error, in the shape of beliefs demonstrably false or absurd, he is normally pulled up by his perception that there is a risk of going too fast; that unintelligent people "need" unintelligent beliefs; and that, somehow, "Evolution" will do the business. This is ultimately the crux of his social philosophy: he cannot bring himself to think of fallacious Man, even in theory, as *making* Evolution in terms of his imperfectly enlightened Will.

Yet his moral idiosyncrasy, his active reason, from time to time forces him to direct and creative action. It is at its best and most fortunate when he is opposing War, which he did to his last day with all the earnestness of a mind profoundly alive to the immanence of Evil in things, and deeply concerned for justice in human relations. But when the same Negativism set him seeking not merely to reduce all legislative action to a minimum, but prescribing to the Japanese a policy of absolute Separateness, extending to the prohibition of all inter-marriage with foreigners and all holding of property by foreigners in Japan, it must be recognized to have brought him to vital self-contradiction. The main inspiration of his own crusade against legislative change at home is resentment or distrust of interference with individual liberty as such. The gist of his advice to Japan is to prescribe a maximum

restriction of individual liberty within that political area. There seems no escape from the conclusion that his views in both cases stand for moods of self-will, irreducible to a common scientific basis.

And thus Spencer in turn comes within the category of the eminent teachers of our youth who mistaught, of the thinkers who did not think enough. By this time, perhaps, we are so reconciled to the discovery that it is no longer disturbing. Alike the prophets and the thinkers, where they deal widely with the problems of life in varied aspects, convince us when we closely study them that no man can think and prescribe for all; that none can escape all the snares of the faulty instrument of human thought. And this is really no very pessimistic proposition, no deeply discouraging discovery. It is merely an aspect of the law of all human faculty: truth is a cumulative construction. It was a great general who said that the best general is merely he who makes *fewest* mistakes. He himself had made many, and some bad ones.

What appears to result is, whether or not there be an expansion of all or any forms of faculty in individuals, a lifting, at least at some points, of the general or corporate level of judgment. The fallacies of the past are more or less completely specified: we may make new, but at least we are put on our guard against those. And the very detection of past mistakes is for the race an encouragement, not a discouragement. Enlightened at this point and that by men of superior faculty, standing out from the mass, we are able to think more justly than they did on a hundred problems of detail. Their common effort accumulates as new truth. So much of error has been eliminated from our chart of the sea of life.

## VI

But let us not, in thus registering corporate intellectual gain in the process of the generations, forget that there is a *per contra* of corporate *non-progress*. There are at this moment among us myriads of men and women who not



merely have not risen to the level of correcting the thinking of the past, but continue to reproduce errors of past thinking which were exposed by those very men whose errors we have been contemplating. If Mill and Spencer, to say nothing of the Carlyles and the Ruskins, came short of an adequate socio-political doctrine, what is the measure of enlightenment in what passes for socio-political doctrine with multitudes of ignorant yet self-satisfied people around us? Is the Bolshevik much further removed from sound sociology than the Protectionist who undertakes to solve the problem of unemployment by what he calls Imperial Preference? Is the amount of social wisdom to the square mile of population, so to speak, notably increasing?

He must be highly optimistic who is sure it is; and to recognize the doubtfulness of the case is to realize that the teachers of the past may still have truths to teach many. He must be an accomplished politician who has nothing to learn from "*Man versus the State*"; a rare Conservative who could gain nothing from Mill on Liberty and on economics; a notable mind which cannot still find a lead in both to methodical thinking and vigilance against error. Spencer's "*Study of Sociology*" is to this day an unsurpassed gymnastic for all who are willing to think out the practical problems of the social life; and even his "*Principles of Sociology*," static as is the conception of the problem, is a survey by which no real student could fail to profit. And many a time does he take the true view where others err. Whatever might be the scientific hiatus in his own theory of the origin of music, he expressly challenged and confuted the fallacy which makes the function and service of Art didactic and utilitarian instead of æsthetic.<sup>1</sup> For the rest, open as are his studies of the field of evolutionary science to revision in detail, the fact stands out that he is one of the greatest, indeed *the* greatest, of modern pioneers in scientific co-ordination. Comte, his chief

<sup>1</sup> *Facts and Comments*, p. 31. Spencer in point of fact had a large æsthetic element in his life which Arnold, I think, had not, that of music, of which he was always a hearty partaker. He was thus cultured by æsthetic experience in certain regards in which Arnold was not.

rival, though certainly entitled to laudatory recognition, inasmuch as his sociology, though far from being consistently scientific, is full of helpful suggestion, assuredly did not compass the cosmic problem with the grasp of Spencer, and has no concrete work to compare in solidity with Spencer's Psychology, or his generalization of the known laws of cosmic change into one view.

To make this general claim for Spencer as an exponent of cosmic philosophy, at the time of his death, over twenty years ago, was to clash with a then prevalent hostility, especially in academic circles, where he was never forgiven for being self-trained. In these twenty years, however, the slow justice of Time has probably wrought a comprehensive change. I can at least now cite in support the judgment of the American Professor J. M. Baldwin, an expert of singularly wide knowledge, and of unchallenged reputation for originality and power.

"It is strange, but it is true," he wrote in 1913, "that many British writers find it impossible to do any sort of justice to Spencer. And yet, where is there the British writer, save Darwin, whose name and theories are to be found in the whole world's literature of a half-dozen great subjects, since 1850, as Spencer's are? We hear it said that half the world now-a-days thinks in terms of Darwinism; but it is truer to say, 'in terms of evolutionism'; for half of the half thinks in terms not of Darwinism, but of Spencerism. Moreover, in the Latin countries and in the United States, it was the leaven of Spencer's evolutionism that first worked its way through the lump. Why not, then, recognize Spencer as what he was, one of the greatest intellectual influences of modern times, a glory to British thought?"<sup>1</sup>

And while the scientific debate is thus memorably summed up on Spencer's side, there can be no hesitation among the lovers of reason in deciding that his moral stature is as high as the intellectual. Of him, as of Mill, we can assuredly say that here Reason is justified of her children. Against all the heartless criticism of the maimed spirit which completed a world voyage that would have sorely taxed the powers and the courage of the strongest, there is to be set the deliberate testimony of those who knew him best that they never knew

<sup>1</sup> *History of Psychology: A Sketch and an Interpretation*, 1913, ii, 81, note.

a morally nobler man. Whatever course he took, he was wholly loyal to justice and righteousness, to the full extent of his vision. In no equal body of work is there maintained a higher standard of that intellectual dignity which, with power, is the mark of greatness in the world of thought. Contrasted with some of the specialists who assailed him in a spirit at once of academic jealousy and of religious ill-will, he stands visibly on the higher plane. Never from him came the snarl which pretends to be a smile, the malice which professes to be concern for philosophy or science.<sup>1</sup> His very inconsistencies are at times to be traced to the warmth of his moral feeling, even where he sought to resolve the feeling into strict intellection.

On nothing, as aforesaid, did he feel more warmly than on the evil of War. In his last days one might have said to him: "Master, you have taught us that hidden in all widely held faiths there is a fundamental element of truth; that the vast body of religious delusion is somehow the guardian of a fundamental verity which religions do not avow; and that the mass of belief in all times is broadly congruous with the mental capacity of the times. Does not this hold good for practice as well as for creeds? Is there not, by your own showing, some essential rightness in this age-long phenomenon of deadly strife, periodically embroiling great areas of the world?" Whatever might have been the dialectic answer, we know that in truth he could never find moral

<sup>1</sup> Both memorably illustrated in the conflicts with Spencer of the late Professor P. G. Tait, who figured as poorly under Spencer's criticism of his account of "Force" as in his own crass display of *odium theologicum*. His joyful resort to the support of the Rev. T. P. Kirkman's *Philosophy without Assumptions* (1876), on the ostensible ground that its author was a mathematician, set up in some minds thenceforth an indestructible suspicion of the philosophic competence of mathematicians as such. On retrospect, most of the frontal attack on Spencer is now very plainly discredited—is indeed wholly disregarded. But the animus shown is to be historically noted. That of Jowett, unable to reach any save sentimental conclusions, is markedly spleenful and unscholarlike. (See *Facts and Comments*, p. 108.) Later, the remaining orthodox animus of the "educated" classes, pitifully exhibited in the acclamation of the worthless work of Benjamin Kidd on *Social Evolution*, gave a joyful reception to the attack of Professor James Ward. The whole series constitutes a distressing cumulative proof of the lowness of the standards of much English academic thinking, and of the correlative poverty of moral tone. We seem to face a survival of the malice of the cloister.

comfort in reducing to an abstraction the evil wrought by the blind instincts of mankind. That the outlook on life in his last years was clouded for him by his sense of the dangerous recrudescence of militarism around him is the testimony at once to the breadth and sagacity of his vision and to the deep rootage of his moral nature. He was no dweller in cold abstractions. He loved Goodness as he loved Truth; and that the men who like him seek Truth<sup>1</sup> and ensue it are thus found to be no less but more truly humanist than those who claim to put intuition and dogma and authority on the throne of life, is the most enduring light of hope upon all the clouded destinies of Man.

For the light is in no degree clouded by the representation that Spencer found no large measure of joy in life.<sup>2</sup> His malady could well account for that. Rapture, indeed, has never been the frequent state of philosophic minds, of any order of creed. Spencer's wistful concern for the company of children, and his reflections on the slightness of the pleasures of success as compared with the pains of long self-denying toil, have even been cited as proving the inefficacy of his philosophy. When such comments come from those who profess to revere a "Man of Sorrows" they convey an unpleasant impression of intellectual chicanery. But even as to himself, life was not a barren thing for Spencer; and if the debile organism, in age, found little excitation in the sense of success, it must have had in its past many an hour of grave exaltation in the felt attainment of truth, of light,

<sup>1</sup> One of his curious temperamental reactions against the general drift of his own teaching is his headlong assertion (*Facts and Comments*, p. 29) of "the superiority of *the* moral element to *the* intellectual element"—as if they were distinct and wholly disparate factors, never in combination. He alleges that "So long as it will hold together, a society wicked in the extreme *may* be formed of men who in keenness of intellect *vie with Mephistopheles*"—as if Mephistopheles were a symbol of pure intellect, either in range or in method! The "may be formed" is a singularly heedless assertion, in a book that contains warm protests against heedless assertion. But it certainly tells of a warm heart—as well as of a head affected by a structural strain.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Elliot speaks (p. 47) in his superlative fashion of a "complete dominion of wretchedness" in Spencer's later life. Yet he notes Spencer's lasting joy in music. A little attention to the comparative test, a little connotation of other men's lives, especially in old age, would have suggested many modifications of Mr. Elliot's verdicts.

of large comprehension of things. And some of those to whom he lent vision and guidance in the shaping of their intellectual lives might say of him, as fitly as did Lucretius of Epicurus :—

*Quem neque fama deum nec fulmina nec minitanti  
Murmure compressit caelum, sed eo magis acrem  
Irritat animi virtutem, effringere ut arta  
Naturæ primus portarum claustra cupiret.  
Ergo vivida vis animi pervicit.*

## APPENDIX

### SPENCER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

(1904)

HE who undertakes an autobiography faces many risks, and most who make the attempt end in giving "reminiscences" about other people by way of compromise; the latter being, in fact, at once the most entertaining and the most instructive plan for nine writers out of ten. Of Herbert Spencer it might almost have been predicted that, if he tended towards autobiography at all, he would not make any compromise. Personal records apart from expository purpose were always distasteful to him; and he once singled out Crabb Robinson's Diary and Greville's Memoirs as samples of the literature that specially wasted people's time. On the other hand, though not a solitary in his habits, he was signally self-centred. It was natural to him, therefore, to produce an autobiography proper; and one feels it to be specially appropriate that he should make it a "natural history of his mind."

Certainly the risks are not escaped. Reading the first of the two bulky volumes, one speedily foresees a charge of egoism, even of a proclivity to small beer. To judge the work fairly, one must remember that it was begun only when Spencer's health, "failing for some years before, became such that work evolving any mental strain proved impracticable," and when, "to partially fill the hours otherwise wholly vacant, a small amount of occupation appeared desirable." To this explanation, probably, most readers will fail to give due heed; and it will be with no surprise that one of critical habit will meet such a criticism as that contributed the other day to the "Christian Commonwealth" by "Ian Maclaren"—an estimate which is so far from making any allowance for the circumstances under notice that it adds an abundance of spiteful falsification to hostile judgment, by way of relieving the writer's Christian animus.

From the point of view of simple common sense, Spencer's course was

a miscalculation. To write a good biography is fully as hard as to write a good book on education, perhaps even as hard as to write a good book on ethics, unless at least the writer's literary gift is primarily artistic. This Spencer's was not. His book, accordingly, is a kind of annals of his own life, chiefly on the intellectual side; and, as it proceeds on no continuous diary or other systematic document, it is at once somewhat desultory and somewhat incomplete. Since, further, it does not exclude reminiscences of others, yet of necessity supplies these scantily, the whole sets up an involuntary impression of extreme self-absorption, of lack of intelligent interest in other people. Only by constant recollection of the circumstances under which it was all written can we do it justice as the retrospect of an exhausted invalid setting his overstrained but unresting brain to retrace its past.

While, however, the book is thus not sure to please even readers better equipped for appreciation and sympathy than "Ian Maclaren," there is good reason to believe that it is a performance of lasting importance, which will grow progressively more interesting to posterity, and that it will be read with close attention in an age in which our contemporary Ian Maclarens, with all the entertaining trash they have produced, are buried in an impenetrable oblivion. For Spencer, to start with, was a mind of extraordinary capacity; and he has here given a clear and fairly continuous view of his mental growth. No other philosopher has done as much. John Mill, indeed, has given us in his *Autobiography* a more artistically compacted and balanced view of his mental history; but that history is in itself of somewhat less importance to philosophy, though of more universal interest. Spencer's *Autobiography* has some of the special "objective" value, that is added to Mill's by the admirably close-packed biography of Bain. When Aristotle was alive, and when he was but recently dead, every literary fribble in Athens was free to discuss him. Since then the literary fribbles have been fain to leave the subject to others. So will it be with Spencer. The monographs of the future will not be written by the Ian Maclarens of the hour.

The wonderful thing about the book is that, written as it was in the ebb-tide of life, with a flawed brain and shattered physique, only occasionally fit for any activity whatever, it is yet so full of quiet vitality. It is indeed so far from being languid that it is very apt to make the reader forget the avowed circumstances of its composition. Here we are evidently dealing with a reminiscent old gentleman in the full possession of his very original judgment, discussing his own development with much of the large scientific faculty with which he had previously handled so many aspects of the cosmos. The interest he shows in his subject is for the general reader disproportionate. We crave for a rather more frequent recognition of the importance of other people. To posterity, for whom Spencer will be one of the few important men of his day, the drawback will be slight, as posterity will have from other sources a sufficiency of details about the other people. It will doubtless say that he lacked the winning modesty and self-effacement of Darwin, and the hardly less

attractive altruism of Mill ; but it will probably set his calm chronicle, ethically if not æsthetically, far above the exasperated retrospect of Carlyle.

One probable source of misjudgment for contemporary readers is the very effort of Spencer to analyse and synthesize the phenomena of his own mind. After a number of his references to one of his idiosyncrasies—his impatience of study, of drudgery, of attention to other men's thought—we are moved to conclude that he was positively proud of his disability ; till all at once he volunteers an explanation in terms of physiological defect. The "low tone of the vascular system" is for him the probable cause of his inability to plod, to read continuously, to learn a language ; and doubtless he is right in the direction of his hypothesis, if not in the details. And again and again he calmly but trenchantly avows some of his defects, his "constitutional lack of reticence," his undue tendency to censorious criticism in intercourse, his unattractiveness of manner towards those who did not interest him.

It could not but be that the autobiography of such a man should throw many lights on his character : one of his amanuenses, I learn, finds it at once newly explained and newly justified by this record. Not the least bright of the lights, perhaps, is the story of how the boy Herbert, separated for the first time from his parents and placed at school with his uncle, was moved by some small troubles to a passion of home-sickness which drove him to flight, and carried him home in three tremendous forced marches, the first of forty-eight miles, the second of forty-seven, and the third of twenty. He was only thirteen years old, and he did it on bread and water and a few glasses of beer. It was surely the same intense determination to reach a wished-for end that carried the grown man, with his lamed brain, through the long marches of his intellectual life.

Very characteristic, too, is the account of how the philosopher, when at Naples, personally pursued and caught a thief who had snatched his opera-glass and then dropped it. The ruling passion for justice was not to be balked ; and the thief was duly consigned to the grateful police, who asked the philosopher what punishment he would like inflicted.

Another light, on the side of heredity, is the indication of the fact that the liability to brain overstrain was inherited by Spencer from his father, who suffered through the greater part of his life from a nervous trouble which affected his temper and, to some extent, his power of volition. The steadier volition of the son was, apparently, an inheritance from the mother—as the portraits show, he had her long upper lip, mouth, and chin, though his thinking power came through the father. Concerning his father, a man of admirable character on most sides, the son frankly admits "the one great drawback—he was not kind to my mother." The unkindness was on one peculiar line. The old gentleman had a conviction that, if any one failed to put a question clearly, the proper consequence was that there should be no answer. When, therefore, Mrs. Spencer put a question that to his mind lacked lucidity, he made no comment ; he simply held his tongue, as if he had heard nothing. It was a preposterous regimen, and might have had disastrous results with a wife less devoted

to doing her duty. Doubtless the unpleasant whim was a result of the brain trouble, which had been brought about, as the son's was later, by overwork.

For the rest, both parents were fixed believers in "revelation"; and though Spencer traces to his father's precept and example as well as to heredity his lifelong bent to the study of causation in all things, he owed to him no part of his philosophic system.

One could have wished, indeed, that the son had been a little less zealous to prove this; as one could have wished that he had been less concerned to deny every shadow of debt to Comte. The two system-makers differed so widely in their conclusions that the younger need hardly have grudged to think that he had had some impulsion from the elder. To me he does not seem to make it at all clear that in his admitted early reading of Mill's "Logic" he cannot have seen the sections which set forth Comte's attitude on sociology. On the other hand, it is now made quite clear that Spencer's solitary visit to Comte, on which some Comtists are wont to hang their claim that he sat at their master's feet, was not at all made in the character of a disciple, but was by way of carrying to Comte some money that was owed him by Chapman as publisher of Harriet Martineau's summary of his system. Spencer knew so little French that he could have gained few ideas by such a visit. It remains memorable that Comte advised him to marry by way of curing his brain trouble.

Marriage was for him impossible, inasmuch as he cared much more for his work than for the conjugal life, and his means at the marrying age would not suffice for both. Yet he frequently avowed his regret over his celibacy. For the great thinker always needed society to complete his measure of satisfaction in life, such as it was. "Can you lend me some children?" he once wrote to his friend Mrs. Potter; and it was always a pleasure to him to have children (preferably girls) or young people by him. Towards the children he characteristically practised his principle of respecting the personality of others; he would not caress them till they were so disposed. Quaintly enough, he carried out the same rule when he took riding exercise for his insomnia; the ride never did him any good because he would never push his horse, having a horror of doing otherwise than as he would be done by!

Perhaps his bias here was not so unchanging as he supposed. His way of leaving all the references in his books to the end, thus calling for the reader's assent without indicating the grounds for it, suggests rather the masterful will than an anxious concern to respect the independence of other minds. And I cannot but see in some of his strange prescriptions of *laissez-faire*, such as the implicit suggestion that the children of careless parents should be left to suffer to the uttermost from their parents' neglect, a touch of the nervous perversity of which he gives us an account in the case of his father. One of the minor lapses in this book is his account of Buckle, of whom, though he met him several times, he has hardly anything to tell, so little ready was he to take an interest in other men's undertakings.



Finally, he quotes Huxley's flippant account of Buckle's physical aspect : "Ah, I see the kind of man. He is top-heavy." And he adds this comment :—

I have never done more than dip into "The History of Civilization in England," but I suspect that the analogy suggested was not without truth. Buckle had taken in a much larger quantity of matter than he could organize ; and he staggered under the mass of it.

Two rejoinders obtrude themselves. An unsympathetic reader might well ask whether the criticism here passed would not in part apply to Spencer and *his* load ; and a sympathetic reader is moved to ask how, if he had never done more than dip into Buckle's book, Spencer could feel entitled to set down so sweeping an estimate of it.

But, once more, we must not be led by the spirit of criticism to forget that these two volumes are the jottings of a much-tried valetudinarian, whose powers had been definitely broken ; who had been forced into self-study by the constant pressure of a malady which was a perpetual menace to his mental life ; and who was reviewing that life at an age at which most men's memory is much impaired. As against the small shortcomings of the book are to be set its ruling note of high rectitude ; its unflagging concentration on the life of ideas, relieved only by a few human excursions into gossip ; its unfailing intellectuality ; and its wonderful variety of interest. It reveals in all his less-known aspects—as inventor, as explorer, as undeveloped artist, as intimate, as man—the architect of the Synthetic Philosophy. Laying it down, one asks : If the injured and overwearied brain could produce this sustained stretch of reasoning retrospect, this long strain of recollection, reflection, and lucid commentary, what must have been its power when it grappled with the tasks to which it gave its strength, and what would have been that strength had it never been flawed ?

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